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PlayStation - The Official Magazine Issue 66 (Holiday 2012)

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DEVIL MAY CRY

We go hands-on with Dante's next killer crusade

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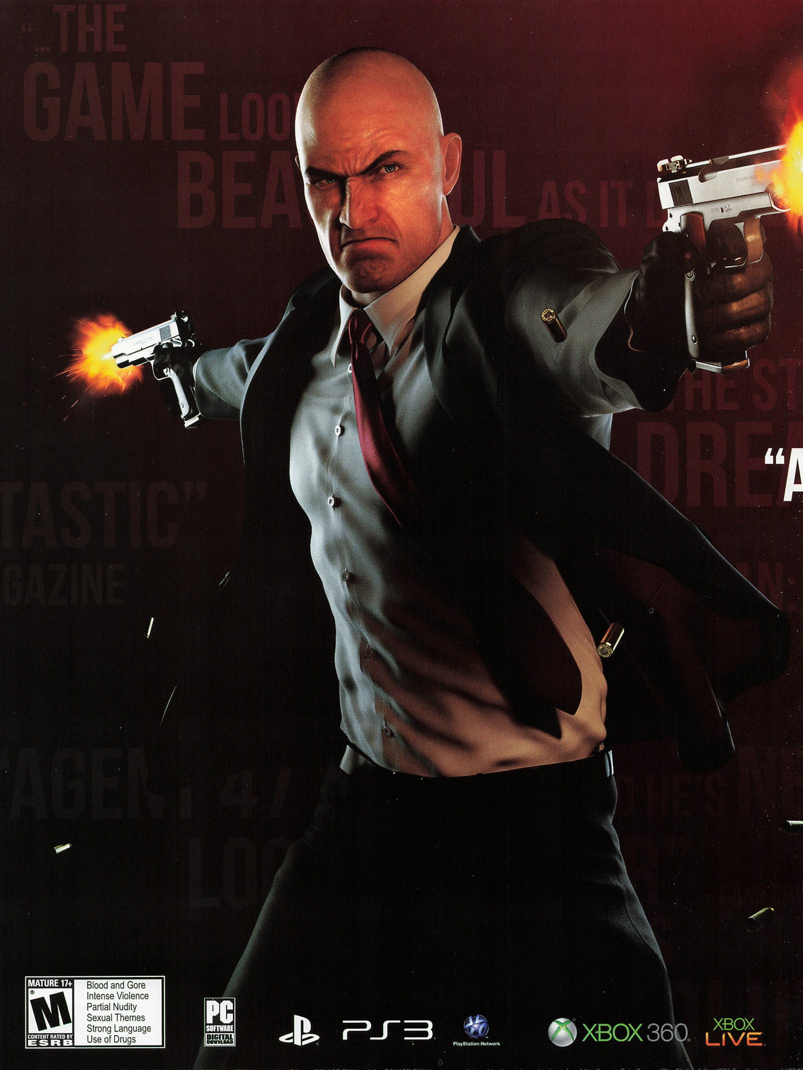
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“LOOKS
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GENT 47’S BACK—AND HE’S NEVER
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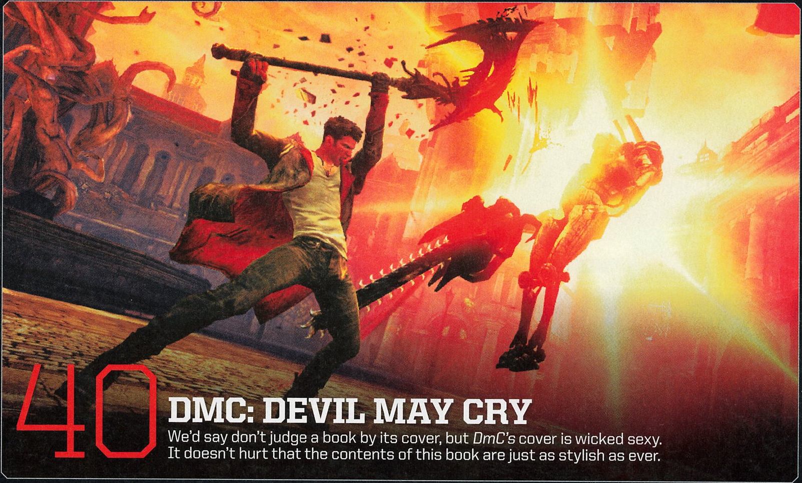
COVER FEATURE



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We'd say don't judge a book by its cover, but *DmC's* cover is wicked sexy. It doesn't hurt that the contents of this book are just as stylish as ever.

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We get to step into the arena as Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman... NetherRealm has only revealed about half the game's roster. The injustice!

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A Time for Gratitude

Taking a moment to appreciate what we have

It's easy to get caught up in the hype and drama of the games industry in this job. We're always focused on what's coming next, usually complaining about what's here and now, and wishing things were more like our overly rosy recollection of way back when. But an old friend of mine, Activision community manager Dan Amrich (@OneOfSwords), makes it a point to remember his blessings every week on Twitter with #GratefulWed. It inspired me to reflect on the past year and note some things I particularly appreciated.

First of all, I'm thankful for 2K Games—and believe me, this is surprising since game publishers are often a source of consternation for me. But 2K's releases have been exceptional this year: we knew *Borderlands 2* had potential but by no means is an RPG-tinged shooter a sure sell, *XCOM: Enemy Unknown* managed to revitalize the dormant strategy genre, and *NBA 2K13* added new layers of excellence atop a foundation of greatness. So thanks 2K, for delivering some of my best game-playing memories of the year.

Next, I'm thankful for Sony's commitment to PSN and indie games. I can't imagine that games like *Journey*, *The Unfinished Swan*, and *Tokyo Jungle* have huge mainstream appeal, but they offer some of the most unusual and compelling experiences available. It's heartening that these "small" games exist, explore, and challenge the frontiers of the videogame medium. They are a wonderful and welcome respite from the rampant shooting and explosions that so often dominate our art form.

Finally, I'm thankful for my delightful, dedicated PTOM staff and all our devoted readers. It is an honor and a pleasure for us to be your monthly source of PlayStation games and culture. May you and yours be as blessed as we are during this holiday season and in the New Year.

Roger Burchill
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Dan Fitzpatrick once informed us that the best presents are the ones we make ourselves, but he didn't seem too impressed when we gave him ceramic plates with all our handprints on them.

Scott Butterworth
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twitter.com/ScottPTOM
When Scott "Glass Eye" Butterworth was just a wee child he was given a Red Ryder BB gun. Let's just say *A Christmas Story* is a cautionary tale for what happened next.

Mikel Reparaz
Executive Editor
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Mikel Reparaz knows it's best to take the bad with the good, but when he got a headless poodle doll for Christmas a few years back he had to draw the line.

Anne Lewis
Assistant Editor
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The worst present Anne Lewis ever received was a used coloring book and a wine cork when she was 14. Strangely, she still has both of them. It's the thought that counts.

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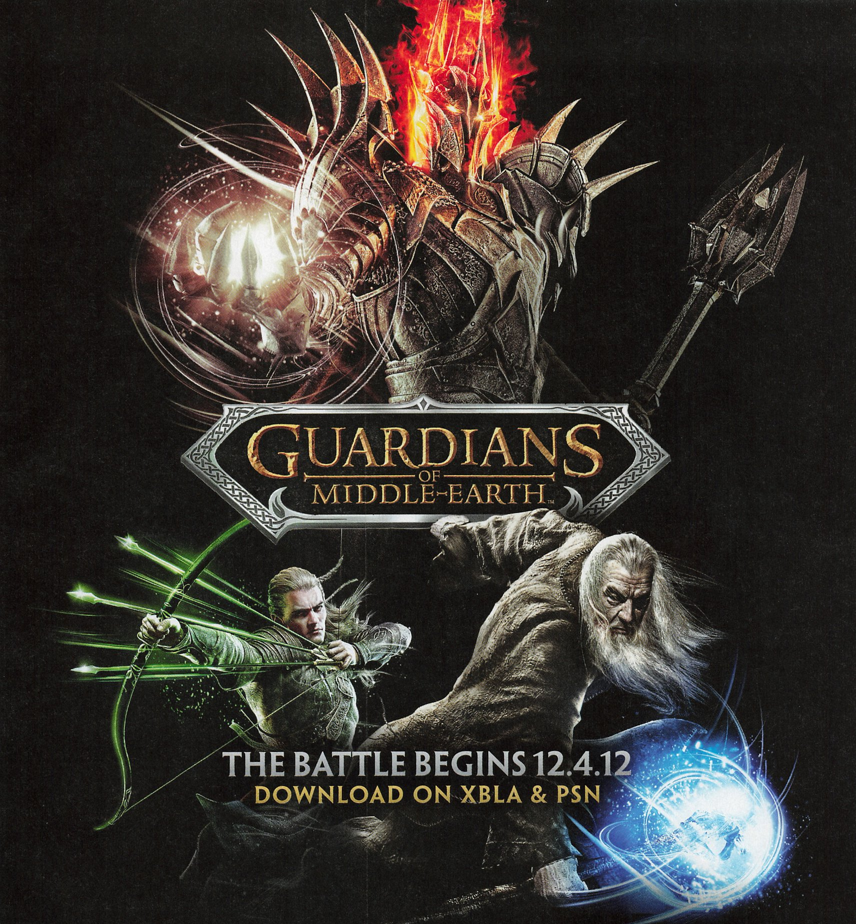

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The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

Wreckless
We tick off our favorite things from Disney's *Wreck-It Ralph.*

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Dark Future
Remember Me's director talks stereotypes and stylish action.

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Kick It Old School
The multitalented Jordan Mechner on remaking his first classic.

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Elite, Not Elitist
Call of Duty: Black Ops II brings the Elite service to all players, for free.

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The Great Debate
Are Trophies better than cheat codes? Do we really have to choose?

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1

The Death of Single Player

Dishonored is the only big holiday release without online play. Why is single-player gaming under threat?

EA Labels president Frank Gibeau stated in Sep 2012: "I have not green-lit one game to be developed as a single-player experience," confirming what we've long feared: all games are being forced online. He was quick to clarify his view, claiming to "believe passionately in single-player games," as long as they "had an ongoing content plan for keeping customers engaged." So what does this mean for those who fear solo-player experiences are being marred by needless multiplayer modes?

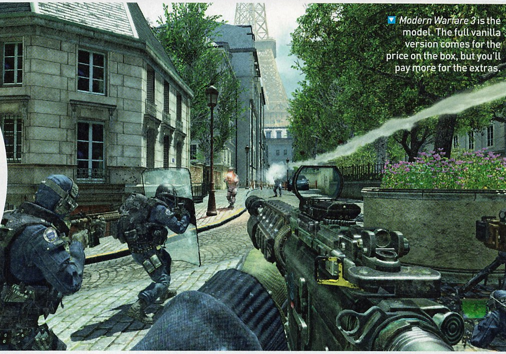
Dead Space 3's contentious co-op mode was born from listening to the fans, claimed Gibeau, causing said fans to hit the messageboards in force. "Cooperative play in a survival horror game?" they replied. It's a bromance! It's a buddy comedy! It's *Resident Evil 5* all over again—a game as terrifying as two happy spaniels on a trampoline!

EA's decision caused Internet uproar because, as fans saw it, it was the clearest example of a publisher ignoring the wishes of its fanbase in pursuit of higher sales. *Dead Space 3* might be the most high-profile case, but it's far from the only title pushing gamers toward online play.

In fact, over 90 percent of holiday triple-A console releases contain a degree of competitive multiplayer, like *Hitman: Absolution's* Contracts mode. Only *Dishonored* is single-player-only, although DLC is surely likely at some stage. So why are so many games online?

The short response is that online components—whether that's micro-transactions, DLC, or competitive multiplayer—make more money for publishers over time than a straight single-player game. "Multiplayer provides several key draws," says game-industry analyst Steve Bailey. "Publishers gain a key selling point, console

▲ *Hitman: Absolution's* Contracts mode is a good example of online play that doesn't feel tacked-on or obligatory.



▼ *Modern Warfare 3* is the model. The full vanilla version comes for the price on the box, but you'll pay more for the extras.

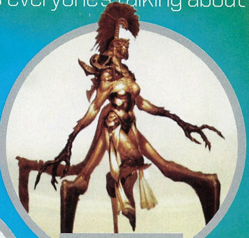
manufacturers gain usage of their online services, and players themselves find lots to engage with." But online modes only work if players don't feel they're being fleeced. One of the key promises of *Modern Warfare 3's* multiplayer was that it would always be free to play. If we want the standard experience, then we pay the price on the box. But extras cost extra.

The danger lies in publishers trying not just to arrive at *CoD's* unprecedented levels of success, but trying to do so by following the exact same roadmap. *BioShock* and *Dead Space* are excellent games that set new standards for atmospheric storytelling. Both were new IPs with powerful narratives centered around isolation, limited resources, madness and the growing sense that maybe your character was a bit of a loon himself. How to translate that into multiplayer? No one knows. And that's why *Dead Space 2* and *BioShock 2's* multiplayer modes are disappointing bullet swaps.

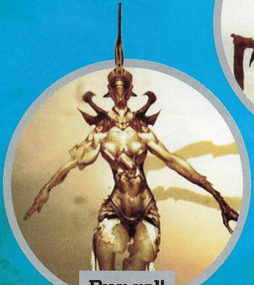
Huge, triple-A franchises like these might be able to get away with this sort of online jerry-rigging, but it's when publishers start foisting the same requirements on smaller studios that things get nasty. Enter *Spec Ops: The Line*; on the face of it another gritty brown modern war game, but with a story mode that builds quickly to some horrifying choices and multiple endings that do anything but glamorize the foul business of war. If there was ever a game more spiritually opposed to a deathmatch mode, it's *Spec Ops*, which is why the game's creative lead Cory Davis infamously slammed its multiplayer as "another game rammed onto the disc like a cancerous growth." Ouch.

"One of the biggest mistakes in regards to quality that I see being made is in regards to 'tacked-on' features, or game modes—in particular, multiplayer," says Davis. "Anything that stands outside the overall focus of a project will be a heavy tax on quality." But that doesn't mean that publishers are evil for exploring online for new ways to make games pay—only that an online component has to fit the game.

The push to take games online, then, is not inherently a bad thing. While titles like *Black Ops 2* continue to perfect a gold-standard online formula, we'll also see more titles than ever before using online innovatively, be it *Hitman: Absolution's* player-run Contracts or *Need for Speed: Most Wanted's* every-stat-comparing Autolog. And while there's an economic argument to be made for extending longevity with online features, last year's number-one game launched with nary a shred of online functionality—and it didn't do *Skyrim* any harm.



Death legs!



Bug gal!

2 Kratos' Deadly Leading Ladies

Meet the Furies, God of War: Ascension's new boss gals

Say hello to Megaera. She's single, athletic, and if you go to dinner with this eligible lady...you'll have your innards torn out by her 20-foot long insect legs as dessert. Aside from being a really irritable date, she's also one of *God of War: Ascension's* three main villains. Kratos, we've just found your perfect partner for those Tuesday-night anger-management classes.

"She's the enforcer", says *Ascension's* lead designer, Mark Simon. "Megaera has these growths coming out of her back that she can use to walk around Doc Ock-style...and obviously also impale people with." As one of Greek mythology's murderous trio of Furies, her fighting style is naturally a tad rough and ready, as Simon explains in a panel at the Penny Arcade Expo (PAX): "She's a grappler who wants to get her hands on you and beat the sh–t out of you."

Manhood Woes

Considering how Miss Stabby-britches and her sisters Tisiphone and Alecto came to be, we're not surprised they make Kratos look more placid than a sauced-up sloth. Remember Cronos? Big, bald dude? Acts like a giant platform level while housing Pandora's Box on his mighty back in the original PS2 hack-'em-up? Well, it was the act of him chopping off his old man Uranus' family jewels (which he then chucked into the sea) that created the Furies. After all, how would you feel if you were the spawn of a deity's severed testicle?

With *Ascension* acting as a prequel to the series' first outing, the Furies play a key part in the pact the Ghost of Sparta makes with Ares—the original god of war. According to Simon, developer Sony Santa Monica chose to go back in time to show our pale executioner in a less brutal light: "We wanted to demonstrate his human side. You never really saw that in *God of War II* or *III*." That said, we'd probably drop the touchy-feely side when you're battling the furious ant-lady, Kratos.

Proto-Kratos

During the PAX roundtable, Sony Santa Monica showed off the very first prototype gameplay for the original *God of War*. In it, a supremely jumpy version of Kratos battled a series of *Jason and the Argonauts*-style skeletons on a partially sunken warship. He also got the chance to don his ancient Greek water wings during a short swimming section.

3

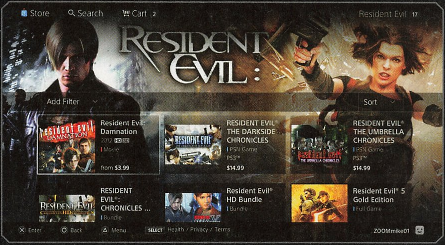
Minding the Store

PlayStation Store gets an attractive and functional makeover

It's not every day that the PlayStation Store goes under the knife for some serious cosmetic surgery, so we're excited about the way the new overhaul is bringing about a sexy world of change to the way we browse and track down PSN content. Whether we're thirsting for the latest and greatest games, TV shows, music, apps, or more, finding and sorting through menus in the hunt for specific content on PSN (which hasn't always been the smoothest process) is much improved. We suspect Sony will continue refining its storefront to iron out any kinks as they arise, but this overhaul is definitely a welcome step in the right direction. Here's a quick rundown of what's new and notable about PlayStation Store's mega facelift.

New Look

The store's cleaner, more streamlined interface does a better job of pushing fresh content to the fore while also making it easier to sort through different types of games and media. We also dig the larger, easier-to-read fonts that are optimized for TV displays, which means less time spent squinting to read text from across the room.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Back
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Game Hub Pages

Landing on a game's new hub screen gives us quick access to a lot more info and related add-on DLC, themes, demos, and trailers than before. To save time, videos can also now be streamed straight from the page instead of having to download them separately.

Improved Search Interface

Virtual hunting and pecking to input search parameters is a thing of the past. The fresh, more intuitive search function smartly predicts content we're searching for as we input each letter, narrowing down the possibilities to make hunting down what we're looking for a lot quicker and easier.

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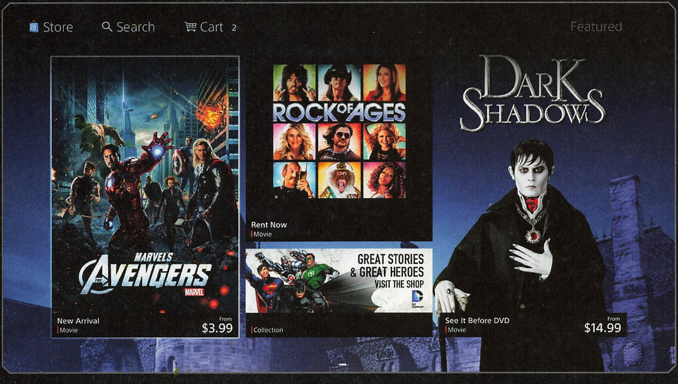
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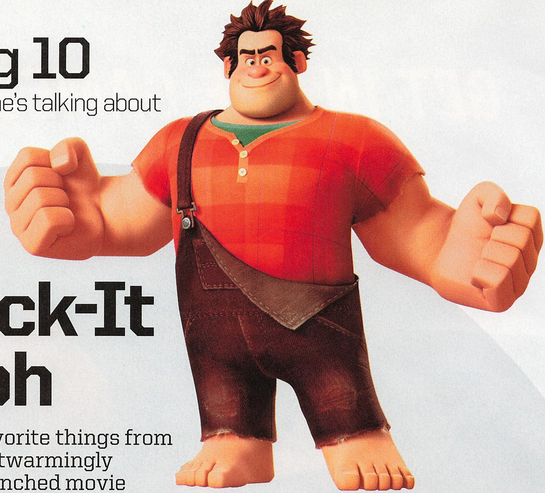
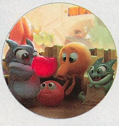


4

Wreck-It Ralph

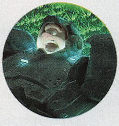
Five of our favorite things from Disney's heartwarmingly reference-drenched movie

Disney's animated tribute to the past 30 years of gaming is out at last—and much to our relief, it doesn't suck. Telling a story with a surprising emotional charge, Wreck-It Ralph takes an attitude toward videogames that's lovingly reverential, while still managing to be extremely watchable even for those who don't play them. Here's what we liked best:



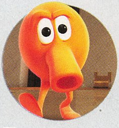
Game Central Station

The industrial surge protector that links all the games in *Wreck-It Ralph's* arcade is more than just a gateway between virtual worlds—it's also a hotbed of crowd scenes stuffed with cameos by dozens of recognizable characters, as well as the setting for some of the movie's most memorable moments.



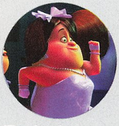
Hero's Duty's "First-Person Shooter"

We've always kind of wondered what we must look like to the computer-controlled characters in first-person shooters—the main character, modeled for their benefit? A floating hit box and a gun? *Wreck-It Ralph* holds the answer, and it's kind of hilarious (and maybe just a little pathetic, too).



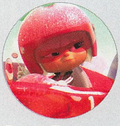
The numerous cameos

As we said, the movie's filled with cameos by, and references to, famous game characters, but some are meatier than others. We're all familiar with the Bad-Anon meeting from the trailers, but the location where it's being held is a surprise—as are the roles that Q*Bert and other characters play in the story.



The herky-jerky Nicelanders

Ralph's apartment-dwelling nemeses might *look* modern enough inside their game world, but their two-frames-per-second animations betray their old-school origins. While Felix and Ralph don't suffer from the same constraints (the movie would be weird if they did), they're a nice touch.



Sugar Rush isn't obnoxious

The candy-pink world of kart-racer *Sugar Rush* was ripe for cloying cuteness, but behind its twee exterior lurks a hellish dystopia of dangerous scenery, vicious bullying, and unfinished levels. What we were sure was going to be an unbearable setting instead became a favorite, even if it's still just a skosche hard on the eyes.

Cameos Work Both Ways

Those who can't get enough of Ralph will be delighted to know he's making a few game appearances this fall—including one as a John C. Reilly-voiced racer in *Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed*, where he drives a transforming truck with a wrecking ball.

5 Jean-Maxime Moris

Remember Me's creative director on sci-fi, social networking, and "men with guns"

Your demo is very action-oriented. What will players be doing in your game?
Remember Me is a story-driven, linear experience, and that's a conscious creative choice. We want to retain as much control over the events and the emotions that the player goes through as possible. It really is a third-person action adventure, where 50 percent is action—combat, chases and boss fights—then the adventure kicks in, where you're rewriting people's memories or dodging drones. We have a great variety of gameplay mechanics, but they all come together to create one varied experience.

We're seeing a resurgence of cyberpunk and skeptical futurism. How does that impact your story?
It's the main driving force behind our universe. The year the game is set in is a wink towards Orwell's *1984*, but we believe that in 2084 a new form of control might have emerged. Already, people are giving the guys in charge all your personal data. They know who you are, who you are related to, who your friends are, where you're going, your political beliefs, your religious beliefs, what music you listen to. Is someone following you? Well, you're doing the policeman's job yourself with your smartphone's GPS, so why bother? We could be giving you this false impression of freedom and liberty when you're actually just being your own watchman. What frightens me is not the technology, it's that very few people question the way social networks work. It's a fascinating theme, and if it makes players think about how open they are with their own personal information, that's good. We're definitely following in the giant elephant footsteps of Philip K. Dick all the way. He is the biggest influence on everything in the world of modern sci-fi, anyway.

To play devil's advocate, why challenge gamers with a story that makes them ask questions? The biggest games in the world are just "man with gun and targets."
Why not? Videogames have become such a formatted medium, but it's the most powerful medium in the world and it has the most potential in the future. Yet everything is formatted. We just wanted to do things differently. You said man with gun, but you forgot to say white man.

***Straight* white man, even.**
Really. How stupid is this industry to only bet on those stereotypes? It's the only thing you give people, they get accustomed to it and don't want anything else. So yes, our character, Nilin, is mixed race, she is female, her sexual orientation is her private life, so I won't go there. She runs around, climbs, leaps, kicks guys' asses, remixes their memories, only kills a few people—and does it all in a game with no blood. We made those choices to say: "You can have something that's kick-ass, something that's powerful, and you don't need it to be ultraviolent."

"We're following in the giant footsteps of Philip K. Dick."

6 Is Dust 514 PS3's most complicated game?

Free-to-play PSN shooter is equal parts fun and WTF

Across Worlds

DUST 514 isn't just a PS3 shooter: the battles link to a huge PC MMO called *EVE Online*. *EVE* focuses on ships trading and battling in space, and is as much about politics and diplomacy as it is war. Players in either game can communicate and trade with each other, events in both titles can affect the other, and players can hire one another for help in the game.

Potentially, *DUST 514* could be huge. It's a free-to-play online shooter with a near-galactic reach...but god, does it hurt our heads. As evidenced by our most recent hands-on, there's so much stuff here—armor and guns and vehicles and menus and menus (and menus). Still, the shooting is good, and there's a *Battlefield*-like depth and scale to battles as we fight to hold locations, call in vehicles, and play around with classes—depending on the needs of the match.

For this to really work when it's out later this year, there's going to have to be the greatest tutorial ever known to man. Tutorialgeddon, even. Basics are easy to understand (Guys in the other color? Kill them.) but the back end of upgrades and items to buy is terrifyingly dense. The key to it all is the Dropsuit, which is more than just a nifty outfit—it pretty much *is* our character. Into it we can pop modules to repair armor, regenerate shields, up damage-dealing, and more. Buffs and weapons are part of the suit, and power consumption and CPU loading limit what we can use.

Suit Up

Everything has a demand on the suit, so we have to weigh the pros and cons—we might only be able to use a damage boost if we drop a shield modifier, say. That concept is easy to grasp but—oh, *but*—the options feel like they're infinite: different suits, guns, modules, augmentations, enhancers, boosters... The in-game market is loaded with stuff to buy, either with currency we earn from matches or real money. Not all of it's available, though: we have to be at the right level. Not just our character, either—our suit, gun, *everything* has its own level. Months into the beta, we're still piecing it all together. The density is intriguing, as there's nothing else like this on PS3—a shooter with a stat-tweaking attention to detail that shames something like *Gran Turismo*—but the biggest challenge here is getting the average gamer past the first five minutes.

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The Big 10

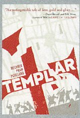
Stories everyone's talking about

7

Jordan Mechner

Creator of Prince of Persia and Karateka talks music, respawning, and revisiting a classic

Crossing Over



In addition to games and movies, Mechner also writes graphic novels; his latest is the Crusades-era *Templar* trilogy, which begins with *Solomon's Thieves* and will be published in a collected volume in July.

The new *Karateka*'s gameplay is a big change from the original. What prompted the switch to a rhythm-action approach?

If we literally reproduced the combat mechanic of the Apple II in 1984, it would feel pretty dated. And I didn't want to do the kind of fighting game where you have to learn a lot of different buttons and combos. I always thought of *Karateka* as more of a story game where the mechanic just happened to be combat; it's a love story, and it's about wanting to get to the end and rescue the princess. The rhythm fighting attracted me because it gives you that cinematic back-and-forth. First you're attacking, then you're defending, and the music can reflect that, and the camera angle can change, as in a movie.

What made you decide on the new respawn mechanic, with three different heroes?

A lot of games give you respawns; you die and you get to continue. That always bothered me a little bit, because every time you come back to life with no explanation, it takes you out of the fiction of the story. In [*Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*], making the story about a dagger that could turn back time was one way to enable the player to continue playing without stepping out of the story. So the three suitors in *Karateka* are another way to do that that's specific to the world of *Karateka*. You start with the character who is most desirable to Mariko, but also the most difficult to win with, and then if you die, the next character is stronger, but…less attractive to her.

Is returning to triple-A production something you're interested in, or is it more interesting to make shorter, more focused experiences?

It's not that I'm interested in shorter games per se, just that that seemed right for *Karateka*. You could almost say I have a pattern of mixing it up. I think one of the reasons that *Karateka* appeals to me so much right now is that it's at the opposite end of the spectrum from *Prince of Persia*, which had gotten so big, with the Disney movie and so forth. This was something that was very contained, with a small team. I find it refreshing to switch between different-sized teams, but also between different media.

Having worked both sides of the industry, is it more appealing to work with a small team or a larger one?

They're both appealing in different ways. You can do things with a big project like *Prince of Persia* that are very exciting that you can't do with an indie game. On the other hand, one of the things that I really enjoyed with *Karateka* this time out is that the team is so small that I could really focus on particular aspects of it very deeply. For example, the music, working with [composer] Chris Tin. On a big triple-A game, where there's so much going on, it's not possible for the creative director to get so deeply into certain aspects of it. But in this case, working directly with the composer and sound designer, the three of us were able to do something really unusual, and integrated the music into the game in ways that even bigger games often haven't attempted.

If *Karateka* does well, do you foresee doing a sequel?

I've had *Karateka* in the back of my mind for the last 25 years. It's a world and a universe that I'm interested in. Yeah, both in games and in other media, I wouldn't rule it out.

8

Free-for-all

Call of Duty Elite services go free for Black Ops II

When it comes to *Call of Duty* online multiplayer, we imagine quite a few colorful four-letter words get flung about amongst the sprays of bullets and the sounds of gunfire. One in particular is getting tossed around a lot lately, and that's "free." Activision is changing up its gameplan for the premium service by making Elite free for all *Black Ops II* players, which is undoubtedly music to a lot of combat-happy ears.

Previously a paid service, Elite delivers a slew of social networking and stat-tracking features aimed at bolstering the online player community. While paid DLC map packs will still be offered separately for *Black Ops II* players, users will have full and unfettered free access to Elite's features.

Among other planned content for the service that's still in the works: Player HQ gives access to match data, special maps, challenges, and class modification with the Pick 10 system. Elite TV features strategy videos, developer tips, and more. Clan HQ makes it possible to join or create clans for competitions, Zombie Leaderboards track undead stats, and a notification system keeps players up-to-date on *Black Ops II* news.

By dropping the fee, Activision hopes to bolster the community and bring more players into the multiplayer fold. Of course, they had us at "*Black Ops II*."

▶ Throwing open Elite's doors to everyone could finally ensure that nobody stops playing *Call of Duty*, ever.

9

PTOM Media

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PlayStation: The Official Magazine has officially made the leap into podcasts. *TalkStation* is a monthly show hosted by Mikel Reparaz, Scott Butterworth, and Anne Lewis that offers a behind-the-scenes look at what goes on while we're making the magazine: Funny stories about the games we cover, details that didn't make it into an article, or maybe just bizarre tangents. Our goal is to give you an entertaining hour or so of supplemental content, so submit feedback and questions at http://facebook.com/PTOMus. We may even answer them in our community segment.

Digital Editions

We've also launched digital editions of the magazine, available on most smartphone and tablet devices. Individual issues cost the same as paper newsstand issues, but a one-year subscription is only $19.99.

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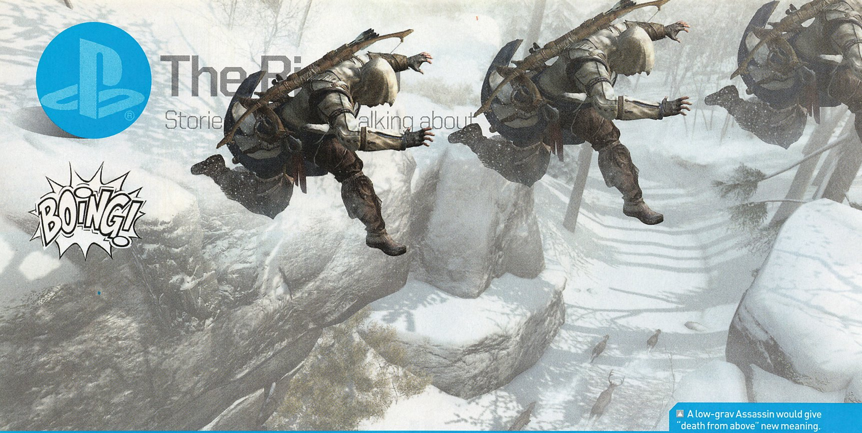

A low-grav Assassin would give "death from above" new meaning.

10 Would cheat codes make a better incentive than Trophies?

It's big heads vs. Platinums as PTOM's editors battle for their reward of choice

Yes
Says the rule-breaking
Scott Butterworth

Assassin's Creed III's open landscapes are littered with optional side-quests, many of which have absolutely no impact on the story whatsoever. They exist pretty much to provide us with an amusing little diversion between story missions. But with very little immediate satisfaction and no tangible long-term reward in sight, I basically found myself wondering, "Why bother?"

Sure, there's probably a Trophy in it for me somewhere, but do you know what I would prefer? Moon physics. Can you imagine *AC* with moon physics? Everything about it would be awesome, and once this would have been more than a distant fantasy. Big head mode, crazy colors, *God mode*—you guys remember this stuff, right? What happened? It's like games suddenly started to take themselves too seriously, and all the goofy fun we used to have no longer fit the mold.

Well, it's time for a return to roots. I get that gaming has matured and devs often want to guide us through a carefully curated experience, but this isn't incompatible with cheat codes. Why not allow us to unlock cheats once we've completed the main campaign? That way, we enjoy the intended experience but can still go back and wreak silly havoc.

Personally, I'm far more motivated by the idea of unlocking something I can actually use rather than some digital icon that gives me nothing but bragging rights.

No
Says goody two-shoes
Mikel Reparaz

Cheats are fun and all, but they're the product of a simpler time—when games were more about basic mechanics and insurmountable challenges than about experiencing stories or worlds. Using cheats to tweak those mechanics was a cool way to bring new life to games or get past tough parts, but at best, they were a cheap novelty—and at worst, a crutch.

How many of us actually got through *Doom* without falling back on God mode? Who could go five minutes in any *Grand Theft Auto* without whistling up a tank, jet, or helicopter? Show of hands? I certainly couldn't—and while those cheats made the games more enjoyable in an "I'm an unstoppable juggernaut of death" way, I was missing out on the tense experiences the developers had intended.

By contrast, slowly phasing out cheats in favor of Trophies has made many of us better (if more obsessive) gamers. Not only do we experience the intended game, but we're rewarded for it—even if nobody really cares but the recipients. What's more, the searches for hidden things that Trophies often reward can add to a game's long-term appeal.

Granted, I miss being able to transform game worlds into something completely different—but if I have to choose between cheap thrills and something that pushes devs to add more content, I know which one I'm going to pick, and it isn't moon physics.

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PlayStation®
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Previews

Quick Pitch

Heroes and Villains

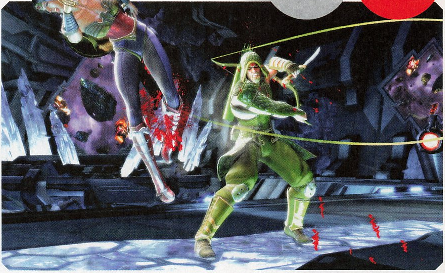
Good and evil don't seem to mean much; heroes fight heroes, villains fight villains. Anything goes.

Location Matters

With 15 total stages, we're still wondering what the remaining ones might be. Themyscira? Bludhaven?

To Be Revealed?

Unconfirmed characters like Lex Luthor and Aquaman have been spotted in the backgrounds of some stages.



HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **April 2013** Pub **Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment** Dev **NetherRealm**

Injustice Gods Among Us

The gods must be crazy

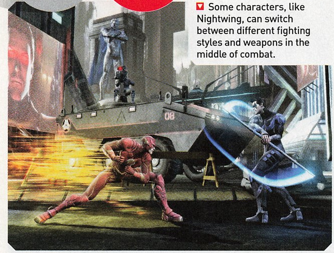
What drives heroes to turn against one another? We've seen it happen in comics countless times, and in fact some of our favorite fights pit Batman against Superman—brains vs. brawn. This darker side to the heroes' tales makes for a perfect fighting-game plot device.

Little is known about *Injustice: Gods Among Us'* story beyond a few cryptic lines in trailers ("I trusted you." "He stole her from me"). Jealousy issues don't explain why human characters like Nightwing can survive being launched into space and slammed to Earth by Superman, but NetherRealm is holding those cards close to the vest for now. Despite the disparity between the strength and abilities of the characters, each seems to be fairly evenly matched. Power characters (Superman, Green Lantern, etc.) and Gadget characters (Batman, Harley Quinn, etc.) can stand toe-to-toe in the arena, but fights in *Injustice* are never just one character against another. It's one character against another against the environment itself, and some characters are just better suited for certain areas.

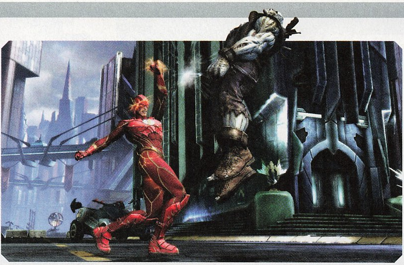
Created Equal?

A powerful character can easily lift and hurl bits of environment at their opponent, but the more agile characters can also use these hazards to their advantage. Fighters like Catwoman and Nightwing can use the same car Superman and Wonder Woman hurl at them to springboard into a powerful kick. These hazards make stage selection just as important as character selection; some levels may simply be more suited to a character who can fly, or one who is lighter on his or her feet.

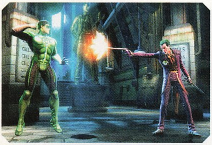
Playing as Nightwing, we entered the Fortress of Solitude to take on Harley Quinn, another Gadget character like us. Here, we made the multi-tiered arena ▸▸



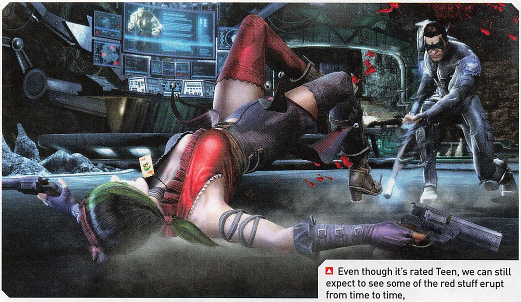
Some characters, like Nightwing, can switch between different fighting styles and weapons in the middle of combat.



Supersonic speed versus huge, lumbering zombie? Who makes these match ups—Don King?! Poor old Solomon Grundy doesn't stand a chance.



Stages like Arkham Asylum have been hinted at in screens, but not officially revealed.



Even though it's rated Teen, we can still expect to see some of the red stuff erupt from time to time,

setup work in our favor. Herding Quinn towards the right side of the stage, we were able to launch an attack that sent her hurtling into Superman's atrium. This area jump works both ways, though. As Quinn barraged us with wave after wave of guns and tricks, we found ourselves with our back to an ominous portal. A quick shove had us flying through the Phantom Zone before being dumped back where we began. As soon as we righted ourselves, we were able to set off our super move: a devastating series of dramatic-looking attacks that netted us the match.

NetherRealm is reusing and upgrading many aspects of 2011's *Mortal Kombat*, including its engine, to suit *Injustice's* needs, and sometimes it feels a tad like a goreless, reskinned version. The button setup is different, actually lending itself well to easier combo memorization, and each fight is only one round—but NetherRealm has admitted to not really wanting to make too many major changes from the *MK* formula. One of the biggest additions, the Clash system, is currently under the knife and may be completely removed from the game. Formerly a combo breaker requiring players to "wager" portions of their power meter in a puzzling blind bet, the Clash system may soon just be a series of cinematic, combo-busting moves.

Though recently confirmed, Green Lantern and the Joker aren't playable yet. However, the Emerald Archer (and his wide array of distance attacks) is. Armed with his bow and witty quips, Green Arrow will be an opponent players want to stay close to; distance means defeat. Also revealed was a new stage called Insurgency, which makes five officially confirmed locations so far, including the Batcave, the Fortress of Solitude, Future City, and Metropolis. NetherRealm producer Hector Sanchez has said Insurgency, a mad scientist's lair full of delightful explosive hazards, will be very pivotal to the game's story mode. **ANNE LEWIS**

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HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **March 2013** Pub **Electronic Arts** Dev **Visceral Games**

Army of Two
The Devil's Cartel

Double or nothing

Despite the masked, tattoo-laden appearance of *The Devil's Cartel's* protagonists, new developer Visceral Games has taken a step back from the wisecracking, bro-tastic tone that marked *Army of Two's* first couple entries. The colorful duo of Tyson Rios and Elliot Salem make way for the generically labeled Alpha and Bravo as the focus shifts to tactical co-op play over personality and charisma.

Our hands-on time with *Cartel* had us taking down a drug lab owned by the game's major baddie, Bautista, before heading to the building's roof for a helicopter extraction. There were, of course, numerous cartel thugs to off as we battled our way to safety—meaning plenty of opportunities to experiment with the game's cover system and its co-op tactics, which required close coordination with our A.I. (or preferably, live) partner.

Successfully outflanking enemies or drawing fire away from our partner was rewarded with boosts to our Overkill meter. Once full, we could choose to initiate Overkill mode at any point (say, when we encountered a body-armored heavy) and temporarily enter a bullet-time-style slo-mo sequence that allowed us to deliver unlimited explosive rounds with precision. Even melee attacks are rewarded with particularly brutal kill animations in Overkill mode.

By the time we reached the helicopter, we'd also experienced other varied sequences that helped break up the gameplay style and pacing; a "split" segment had us fall through the floor to face enemies head-on while our partner provided cover fire from above, and we manned a chopper-mounted minigun for a rail-shooter episode that felt straight out of a blockbuster action movie.

Destructive Duo

The next portion of our demo was hands-off, but revealed a level called Ghost Town, which required blasting into a Mexican village square to rescue a downed compatriot. Once the objective was accomplished, the level transitioned into our heroes fending off wave upon wave of enemies while taking cover in a fountain at the square's center. It offered the perfect opportunity to revel in *Cartel's* dismemberment and environmental destruction: shotgun blasts shredded and splattered limbs, while gunfire and explosions disintegrated cover and caused major structures (like a bell tower) to collapse.

We'll have to see how the scaling back of the franchise's personality ultimately affects the experience, but our early impression is that Visceral seems to have the whole shooting thing down.

ROGER BURCHILL

Quick Pitch

Less Bro, More Co

The Bro-vado has been toned down, with more focus on the co-op play and tactics.

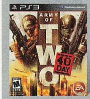
Fill the Overkill

Successful co-op execution fills the Overkill meter, which powers us up to unleash brutal slo-mo combat sequences.

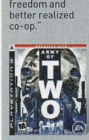
Rest In Pieces

Yes, bodies can be dismembered during battle. It is a Visceral game, after all.

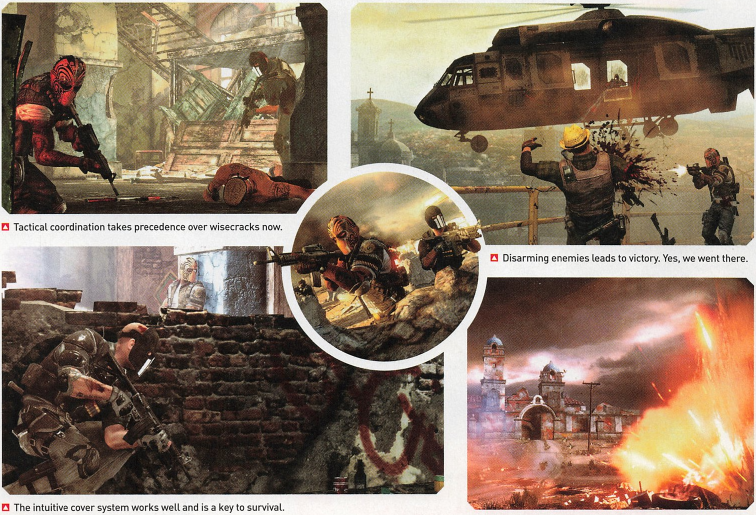
Can't wait? Play these



Army of Two: The 40th Day
(PS3, 2010)
In hindsight, our reviewer may have been overly generous, but *40th Day* does offer "more freedom and better realized co-op."



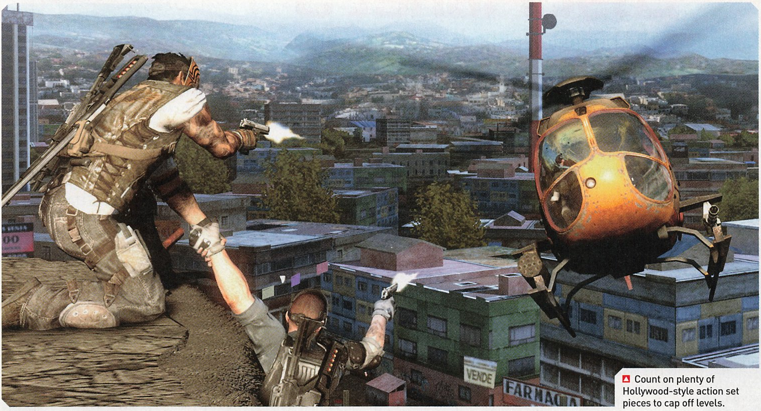
Army of Two
(PS3, 2008)
Where the bromance all started. More style than substance, but our reviewer said you'll feel like a "mercenary rock star."



Tactical coordination takes precedence over wisecracks now.

Disarming enemies leads to victory. Yes, we went there.

The intuitive cover system works well and is a key to survival.



Count on plenty of Hollywood-style action set pieces to cap off levels.

Quick Pitch

It's cold out here!
Jim Peyton braves freezing conditions to earn money for his family.

Occupational Hazards
Jim's ordinary mining duties often involve shooting dozens of huge bugs.

Robo-helper
Jim can even the odds by hopping into giant robotic exoskeletons.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **Q1 2013** Pub **Capcom** Dev **Spark Unlimited**

Lost Planet 3

If the bugs don't kill us, the cold will

After *Lost Planet 2* lost some fans by focusing more on multiplayer than character and story, *Lost Planet 3* seems to be a return to form for the sci-fi shooter. Technically a prequel to the first game, *LP3* once again makes its setting a frozen, icy planet. Which also means the giant bugs that live there, the Akrid, are back as well.

Our latest look at the game demonstrates how *LP3* likes to switch between closed-off environments and wide-open areas throughout its campaign. Protagonist Jim Peyton is a miner who came to the frigid world to earn money for his family back on Earth, which is on the verge of collapse due to an energy crisis. Jim's search for thermal power is technically limited to mining and excavation, but his job often means battling the native fauna of EDN III.

Early in the stage, Jim is tasked with clearing out a swarm of man-sized, wasplike creatures that are interfering with energy collection. Early movement is restricted to tight cave tunnels, though the environment has several spots for Jim to take cover while blasting the winged beasts in their glowing orange weak spots (an unfortunate evolutionary trait of most EDN III species). It's a lot like any other cover-based shooter, just with the threat of being lifted into the air by a huge bug.

Once we've cleared out that area, the action stays underground, but heads to a more open area: the critters' hive, which demands switching our attention between shooting the hive's pods and defending ourselves from more giant wasps. It's an area that really tests Jim's rechargeable health, especially during the quick-time events that pop up if the bugs get close enough to grab him.

The Great Outdoors

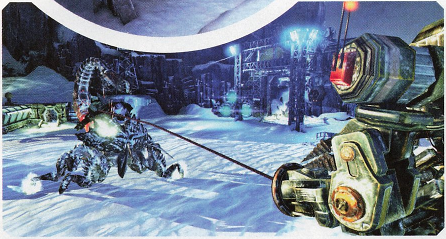
The tone changed once we made it out of the caves and onto the planet's snowy surface. Here it's much quieter, with icy winds overpowering most other sounds. Jim stumbles onto a mining outpost, but it appears to be sabotaged, implying more people than just the mining company NEVEC are on EDN III.

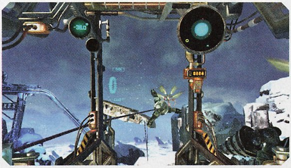
Things are a little too quiet as Jim starts fixing the station's satellite dish, and sure enough, the silence is soon broken by the appearance of one of the bigger species of Akrid. Looking like a hideous cross between a crab and a scorpion (if said scorpion could blast venom from its tail), it sports a large orange weak spot in the center of its tail. Jim's machine gun, the same one we'd previously used to capably blast apart the wasp Akrid, barely makes a dent in this new enemy.

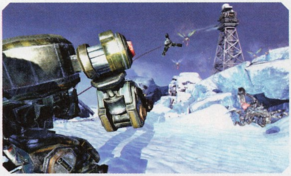
Lost Planet History

Jim works for NEVEC, the company that longtime *Lost Planet* fans will remember as the evil controlling force of EDN III in the first game. Are they already evil in *LP3*, or is this the tale of how the company lost its way?

Even with Jim's thermal suit, being exposed to the elements can be dangerous.







In addition to punching, rigs also let us target enemies with a grappling claw.

> Glowing orange weak spots are an unfortunate evolutionary trait of most EDN III species.

Eventually, we've shot the creature enough that it runs off to rethink its plan of attack, giving Jim a chance to take control of a mining rig. The previous *Lost Planet* games had the more advanced VS mechs that were designed for combat, but our bulky new rig clearly wasn't made for that. Fortunately, Jim's a resourceful guy, and finds a way to make the mechanical suit work for him.

In the rig, the perspective shifts to first-person, and the scale radically changes. Jim is now about twice the height of the crab-scorpion, and he starts pounding away at it. But the arms aren't all that fast, so attacks have to be carefully timed—otherwise, Jim is left exposed in the cockpit. The whole sequence feels like a boxing minigame, and after Jim eventually stuns the beast, we switch to the rig's drill and hack off the creature's tail the hard way—a satisfyingly gory moment that closes out the stage.

In this brief chunk of gameplay, *Lost Planet 3* got a chance to show off its versatility within just a single level, switching between different scales and gameplay styles, all while layering in an intriguing story. This might just successfully reclaim the series' past glory by returning to its roots.

HENRY GILBERT

Five other western-developed Capcom games

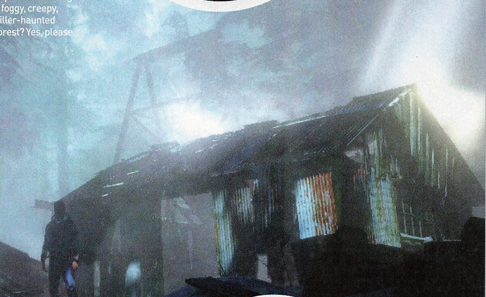
1 **Bionic Commando** The overdue sequel was panned for bland graphics and story.

2 **Dark Void** Despite its unique look, this high-flying shooter was forgotten as soon as it arrived.

3 **Dead Rising 2** The zombie-filled sequel was actually better than the Japan-made original

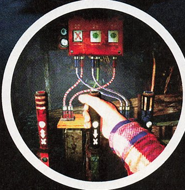
4 **Remember Me** A promising action game about probing people's memories in a dark future Paris.

5 **DmC** Will the fan-enraging revival be a too-gritty dud? Read our cover story to learn more...



Nighttime exploration through a foggy, creepy, killer-haunted forest? Yes, please.

This stag may have been gruesomely disemboweled, but that doesn't mean he's not dangerous.



Because this is a Move-centric game, we can expect at least a few manipulation-driven minigames.

FIRST LOOK Format **PS3** ETA **2013** Pub **SCEA** Dev **Supermassive Games**

Until Dawn

Move trades minigames for first-person horror

Horror games have covered everything from the zombie apocalypse to the *SAW*-style torture-porn, but surprisingly few have tackled the teen-slasher-flick genre. *Until Dawn,* a Move-enabled first-person fright-fest, plans to remedy this with a fresh interactive take on familiar horror film tropes.

Complementing a creepy, cabin-in-the-woods setting with campy dialogue delivered by frisky teenagers, *Until Dawn* feels as much like the next *Friday the 13th* film chapter as it does a game. In fact, our look at the game features a pair of teens separating from their friends to seek a little alone time in an actual cabin in the woods. Of course, the difference is the player's participation; here, we're prompted to move the lovin' along by pointing the peripheral at our female partner to begin undressing her with a button press. *Until Dawn* ultimately proves it's more about scares than sexy-time, though, as an unseen entity soon crashes through the window and drags the now partially dressed girl away. The protagonist grabs a shotgun and gives chase, but isn't quick enough to keep his girlfriend from becoming a corpse.

What's most interesting, aside from the mystery monster with a hunger for horny teens, is that the girl could have apparently lived and the game would have progressed down a different path. *Until Dawn* features eight playable characters, any of which can fall victim to things that go bump in the night—but their deaths don't spell failure, just an evolution of the narrative.

In addition to this *Heavy Rain*-like approach to storytelling, *Until Dawn* stands out for its streamlined Move integration. Forgoing complex gestures in favor of simple mechanics, it's serious about not letting frustrating controls get in the way of its frights. We'll find out just how serious when we finally get some hands-on time.

MATT CABRAL

Scary Scribes

Rather than relying on in-house writers to cobble together a nerve-fraying narrative, Sony brought on indie horror-film veterans Larry Fessenden (*The Last Winter*) and Graham Reznick (*I Can See You*) to ensure *Until Dawn* drips with slasher-film authenticity. Because of the game's unconventional approach to storytelling, though, the pair had to craft dialogue to accompany every possible outcome. Talk about scary.

“★★★★★”

Amazing app, and it's FREE!

by Vitsnuklz

“★★★★★

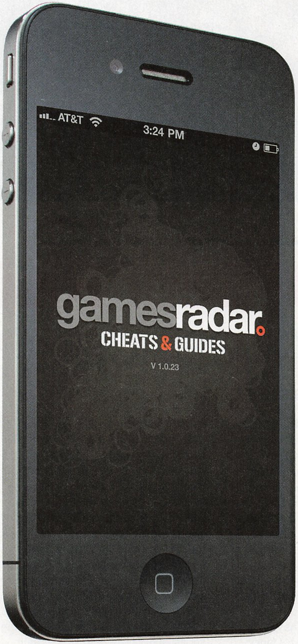
THE BEST GUIDES
on the internet…
ALL IN ONE PLACE”

by Samael76

“★★★★★

Thank you GamesRadar for
FEEDING MY ADDICTION”

by Poconoscott



“★★★★★

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by June Martin

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Quick Pitch

Love/Hate
Once reviled by gamers, Raiden now headlines one of 2013's most anticipated games.

Make It Right
Raiden's cyberninja skills are better than ever, thanks to an upgrade from developer Platinum.

What is a man?
Even with the heavy action, there's still the same focus on dense narrative for which *Metal Gear* is famous.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **February 2013** Pub **Konami** Dev **PlatinumGames/Kojima Productions**

Metal Gear Rising Revengeance

Cutting things short

The *Metal Gear* franchise is known for twisting, drawn-out stories, and the same can be said for *Revengeance*. Starring the once-hated Raiden, *Revengeance* has had its troubles, but the title's cutting action is very much back on track. And if its first chapter is anything to go by, it'll be an exciting combination of styles from two of the top developers in gaming.

Made by PlatinumGames (*Bayonetta*, *Vanquish*) under the supervision of regular *Metal Gear* devs Kojima Productions, the game begins with the re-introduction of Raiden in his fancy new black armor. Rebuilt after being literally taken apart by a group of terrorist cyborgs known as The Desperados, Raiden has followed them to a small European village and is looking to even the score. Soon he's fighting his first set of henchmen, and it's easy to see the impact that Platinum has had on the gameplay. Raiden can take apart his enemies with fast, flashy, buttonmashy combos, alternating between his high-tech sword and his bladed feet. But it's far more satisfying to slow things down with Blade mode, which lets us carefully aim Raiden's sword to slice apart virtually anything in the environment, any way we want—especially if it's people. Combining both attack methods gives the game's pace a nice mix of fast and slow elements.

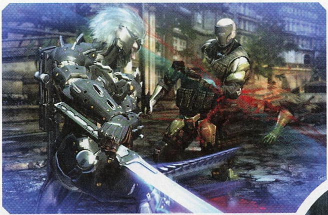
Even with the frenetic action going on, the storytelling feels appropriate for the series, and it's where Kojima Productions shows the most influence. Raiden has long CODEC conversations with his support team, the plot asks bigger questions about the morality of advanced technology, and bosses have long, introspective soliloquies. And as the opening chapter's boss battle proved, that's even true for huge robot dogs with chainsaws for tails.

LQ-84i is a resourceful cybermutt assigned to kill Raiden, and the battle takes quick reflexes, particularly when slipping in and out of the slow-motion sword slicing. This and later boss battles have multiple cinematic moments interspersed with the combat, giving the fights the drama of *Metal Gear* cut-scenes without taking away control. That approach made the fight's ending all the sweeter when we were given direct control over hacking the demon dog to pieces—but don't say goodbye yet. LQ returns as an ally later.

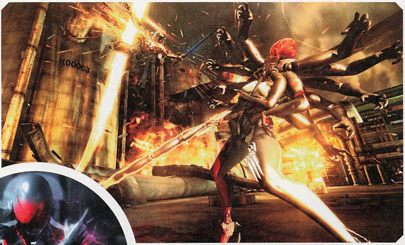
There's still much to be seen in the once-troubled spin-off, but the game seems to be coming together really well. It could end up being the perfect combination of the strengths of both studios, and could even end up making Raiden the franchise lead he was always meant to be. **HENRY GILBERT**

Meet the New Boss(es)

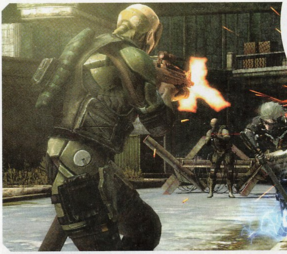
Many came to love Raiden again in *Metal Gear Solid 4*, thanks to his incredible fights during cutscenes. Platinum wants to recapture that feeling in the boss fights, with cinematic moments and QTEs popping up often, including hopping from missile to missile, and then dragging Raiden's sword while running up a huge Metal Gear lengthwise to cut it in half. The new approach to combat mixes well with the series' drama, it seems.



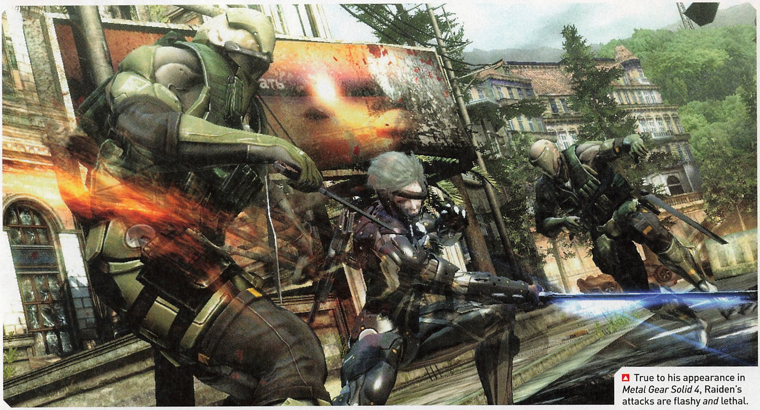
Blade mode lets us cut whatever we want, however we want.



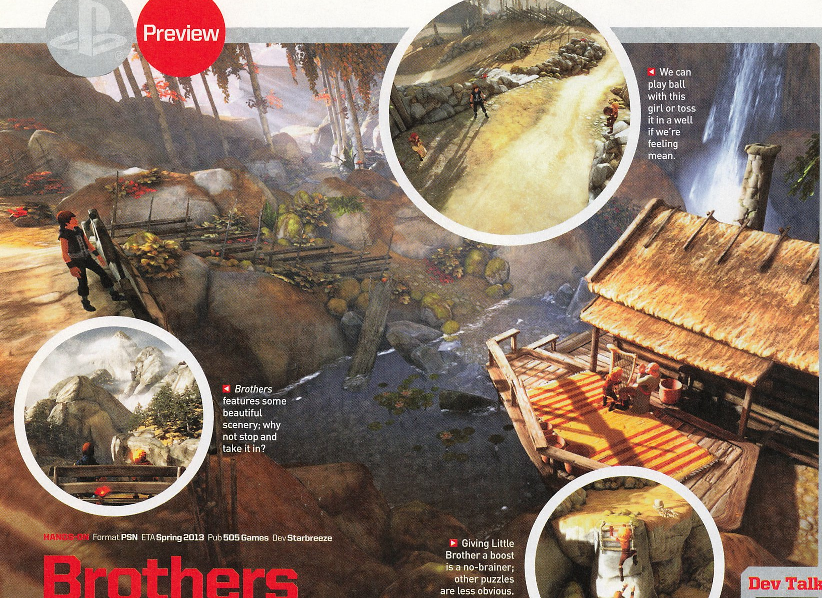
This boss' arms can detach and form new weapons.



When in a tight situation, dashing directly at the bullets is rarely a bad idea.



True to his appearance in *Metal Gear Solid 4*, Raiden's attacks are flashy *and* lethal.



We can play ball with this girl or toss it in a well if we're feeling mean.

Brothers features some beautiful scenery; why not stop and take it in?

Giving Little Brother a boost is a no-brainer; other puzzles are less obvious.

HANDS-ON Format **PSN** ETA **Spring 2013** Pub **505 Games** Dev **Starbreeze**

Brothers A Tale of Two Sons

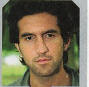
Single-player bro-op

Swedish developer Starbreeze has built its reputation on violent, story-driven first-person adventures, with a rap sheet that includes *The Chronicles of Riddick* and *The Darkness*. With *Brothers*, the studio's trying something different: a puzzle-driven, whimsically nonviolent three-to-four-hour adventure about two boys—both of whom are controlled simultaneously by one player—out to find a cure for their dying father.

The Left-analog stick and L1 control the stronger, more mature big brother, while the weaker, more playful younger one is guided by the Right-stick and R1. Keeping tabs on both is a little daunting at first, but with practice, we didn't have much trouble pushing them through their medieval-fantasy world and its myriad obstacles. Solving the game's assorted puzzles means understanding each boy's strengths and weaknesses; as the stronger, more responsible one, the big brother tends to be more useful when it comes to things like asking people for directions or lifting heavy objects. Meanwhile, the more childish little brother can do things his older sibling can't or might not think to, like clambering up to high places to kick down a rope for big brother to climb, or doing seemingly mean things to animals or strangers—which can actually benefit their recipients. Rolling a white rabbit in ash, for example, causes it to be accepted by its skittish dark-furred peers.

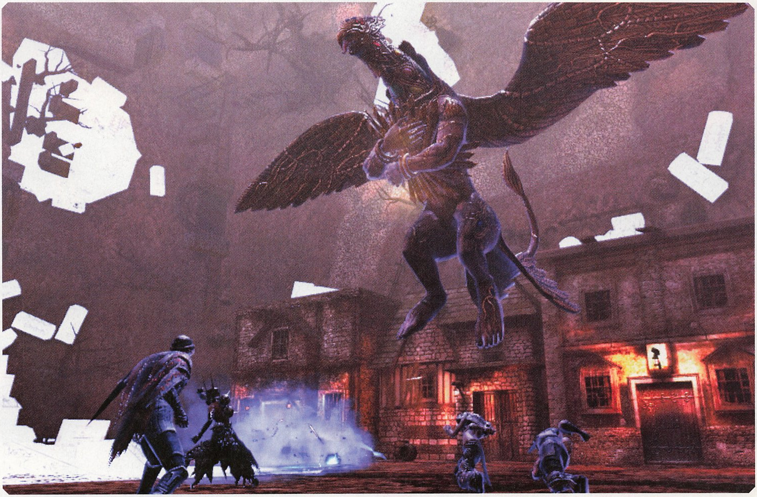
More often than not, puzzles require both brothers to work together; one we tried had both brothers alternately running to high ground and yelling to distract an angry dog that guarded a hayfield, while another challenged us to figure out who should run in a giant hamster wheel (Little) while the other (Big) crossed the bridge it lowered and grabbed a sheep—who then replaced the little brother in the wheel. With the promise of one-player co-op hang-gliding, goat-riding and troll-befriending in the boys' future, *Brothers* seems to be making the most of its short run time. **MIKEL REPARAZ**

Dev Talk



"A big thing is taking away the repetitive experience. Everything [in *Brothers*] is new all the time. Everything you see, you will never see again. Every experience can happen only once, even if it's big and insane. Every NPC, unique characters, unique stuff, which is quite insane from a perspective of content, but I think is very important, because it is a short game. The best way to describe it is like a fairy tale."

Josef Fares
Game Director



HANDS-ON Format **PS Vita** ETA **2013** Pub **SCEA** Dev **Marvelous AQL/SCEJ**

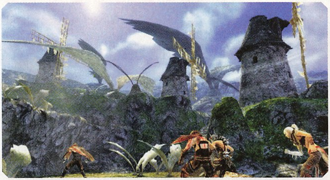
Soul Sacrifice

What are we willing to give up to win?

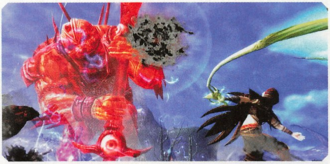
Designed by former Capcom luminary and Mega Man creator Keiji Inafune, *Soul Sacrifice* would be garnering a lot of attention even if it wasn't one of the biggest Japanese games coming to PS Vita. Made in the style of *Monster Hunter* and similar titles, *Soul Sacrifice* has a much darker and stranger tone than most games in the genre. Not only because its enemies seem ripped from fevered nightmares, but because the game asks us to give up much in the name of victory.

Up to four players can take the field, all of them ideally working together to defeat the huge monsters that stalk the stage. *Soul Sacrifice* focuses more on offense than most similar games do, giving us a variety of different moves and combos. Once an enemy is slain is where the "sacrifice" comes in.

After killing one of the freakish monsters, we can either rescue or sacrifice its soul, which heals our team or powers up our character, respectively. The same can be done with the soul of a fallen comrade. These choices really test our capacity for teamwork; do we help our buddies or empower ourselves (and then become a better asset to the team)? With that unusual angle, *Soul Sacrifice* might just stand out from the *Monster Hunter* crowd. **HENRY GILBERT**



▲ *Soul Sacrifice's* world looks pretty and idyllic, but dark secrets hide beneath its sunny blue skies.



▲ When we're eventually faced with the prospect of saving or sacrificing this creature's soul, we don't plan to be compassionate.

Quick Pitch

Travel Japan

Experience accurate recreations of five major Japanese cities.

Work Hard

Play as five different characters, all trying to make their way in the Japanese underworld.

Play Hard

Tons of fun distractions are scattered throughout, including classic arcade games and snowball fights.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **TBD 2013** Pub **Sega** Dev **Sega**

Yakuza 5

A number can mean so many things

The *Yakuza* series has a dedicated following in the U.S., but the franchise grows into a bigger success in Japan with every new entry. After making their Japanese-mafia tough guys battle the undead in the simplified palate-cleanser *Dead Souls*, the devs are returning to the "regular" series with fresh eyes. And they're using the number five as the starting point for that renewal.

Yakuza 5's plot revolves around growing animosity between the franchise's many different mobs, with a full-on war bubbling up. The story will have the largest number of cities in *Yakuza* history as its backdrop, taking place in five distinct locales across Japan. Not unlike *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, *Yakuza 5* drops its characters into a huge, sprawling world of cities based on famous (and infamous) parts of Japan, including Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, and Sapporo.

Unlike *San Andreas*, each city tells a distinct story about one of the game's five protagonists, spreading out the narrative a bit more than usual. The Tokyo streets of series' lead Kazuma Kiryu's story feature the same level of accuracy we've come to expect from the franchise, right down to the Sega arcade center featuring playable versions of *Virtua Fighter 2* and *Taiko Drum Master*. Of course, those are mere distractions from Kiryu's story, which at one point involves helping a young girl. Fans of the series won't be shocked to learn that said help mostly involves mercilessly beating up street punks.

In the first story mission, Kazuma defends the girl—who's surrounded by frightening young men—by breaking up the fight with strong kicks and punches to the heads of his new enemies. However, when it's time to finish them off, he pulls out the pro-wrestling moves, with damage that's much more real than what we usually see in the ring. He smashes heads with power bombs, pile drivers, and suplexes, leaving his enemies prone and coughing up blood. And once we track down the girl's father, it turns out he needs us to defend him from even more punks.

Those fights were nothing compared to the huge gang wars early footage has teased, and *Yakuza 5* promises that its characters will look better this time around, as the devs are using a new graphics engine instead of recycling the same one used in *Dead Souls*. This easily looks to be the biggest *Yakuza* title to date, but here's hoping the huge size doesn't prevent it from getting its massive script localized for the U.S. sometime next year. **HENRY GILBERT**

Don't Forget to Have Fun

Yakuza has always featured a huge collection of minigames, but the fifth game really raises the bar. There's taxi-driving, bowling, arcade games, fishing, billiards, batting practice, darts, and the fan-favorite hostess bars. With all that, it'll be hard to focus on establishing a criminal empire.

Japan's neon-lit cities are looking more impressive than ever.

Haruka's story has her aspiring to be an idol singer.

Thanks to a collaboration with Namco Bandai, *Taiko Drum Master* is playable in *Yakuza 5*.

Shun returns from *Yakuza 4*, with his badass roster of fighting moves intact.

▲ The game is stuffed with mammoth mechs to shoot and ride around in.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **Q2 2013** Pub **Electronic Arts** Dev **Crytek**

Crysis 3

Multiplayer prioritizes tension and tactics over brute force

There are plenty of big new features in store for *Crysis 3's* multiplayer. The New York Feed—think *Need for Speed's* Autolog, but for kill counts—makes challenges, special game types, and more accessible via a 2D map of the Big Apple. Hunter mode adds tension by pitting two nanosuited commandos against 10 Cell grunts (who switch sides when killed). There's also powerful alien weaponry to discover, lampposts to use like giant baseball bats, huge mechs to stomp around in, and Prophet's deadly bow. *Crysis 2's* repetitive multiplayer left us cold, but these new features look set to make online play a bit more special. **JAMES COATES**

Player4
Enemy 30

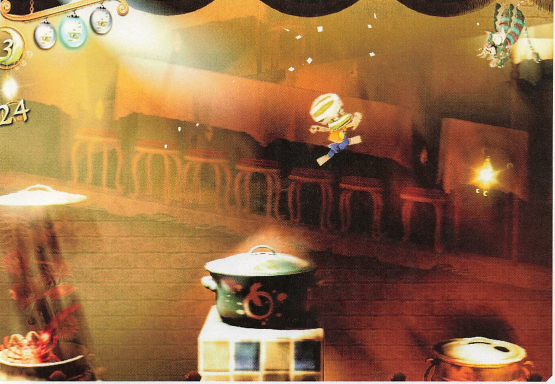
HANDS-ON Format **PSN** ETA **Q1 2013** Pub **Reverb Publishing** Dev **Casual Brothers**

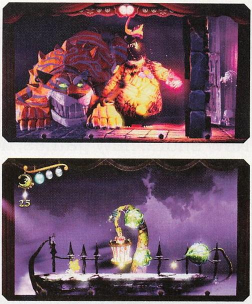
Orc Attack

The furious, flatulent four

Pollution can have some very unintended results: health concerns, animal extinction, and now, violent orc flatulence. That last one doesn't seem to fit, but it's the premise of *Orc Attack*. Humans have been polluting the orc homeland with their technological advances and whatnot, which has given the big green ones powerfully violent gas. Making the best of a bad situation, they turn around and use their lethal farts to drive the humans out of their home.

A fairly basic action game at its core, *Orc Attack* takes cues from classic beat-'em-ups like *Gauntlet* or *Golden Axe*, pitting four players against oncoming human hordes.





Puppeteer's premise might make our skin crawl a little, but its vibrant, mysterious world has us intrigued.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **2013** Pub **SCEA** Dev **SCE Japan Studio**

Puppeteer

Creepy puppets meet creative platforming

Based on its title and puppet show-inspired presentation, we thought *Puppeteer* might be an adorable little platformer aimed at kids. We were wrong. After spending some time in its nightmare-conjuring world, we can say this inspired take on the genre is more creepy than cute.

We assume the role of a marionette-like boy...who has his blocky head ripped from his shoulders by an angry bear at the game's start. Armed with a magical pair of scissors and befriended by a witch obsessed with said shears, we navigate a kitchen filled with angry utensils, ascend the steps of a dark castle, and battle a knight made out of cloth.

In addition to performing genre gameplay staples—jumping, rolling, collecting—throughout our twisted trek, we also scoop up new heads and control a floating cat. The former, switched on-the-fly with the D-pad, possess different powers, such as an added boost to the protagonist's jump, while hovering the feline over specific areas reveals secrets within levels. Of course, those scissors come in handy, too. On top of making short work of fabric-y foes, the blades are used to navigate the world; for example, we were able to climb spider webs by chopping through them.

Built around familiar platforming gameplay—tweaked with some fresh tricks—and complemented by the most original (if disturbing) story and setting we've experienced since first meeting Sackboy, *Puppeteer's* poised to be PS3's next sleeper hit.

MATT CABRAL

Running in Place

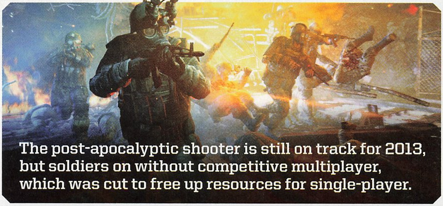
Puppeteer's imaginative method of moving levels along sees the protagonist remain in single frames while the world around him drops and jumps into place—a cool effect that keeps us on our toes.

Each orc is given a special power that affects the way farts and burps leave their body. We've got lightning burps, flaming burps, and rock burps, all of which can be combined with our compatriots' farts for extra area-of-effect damage...for those of us who are into that sort of co-op thing, anyway. Oh, and we can hop on each other's shoulders and swing our axes wildly to do massive damage to tall enemies' faces. Because, why not?

As a throwback to the classic beat-'em-ups of yesteryear, *Orc Attack* isn't setting the bar too high. All it wants to deliver is fun co-op action that doesn't take itself too seriously. And in that regard, it's something to watch out for. TAYLOR COCKE

Where the hell is...

Metro: Last Light? (THQ)



The post-apocalyptic shooter is still on track for 2013, but soldiers on without competitive multiplayer, which was cut to free up resources for single-player.

The latest on...

New shots, new games, new info

Dead Space 3

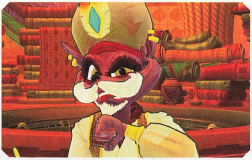
Format **PS3** ETA **February 2013**
Pub **Electronic Arts** Dev **Visceral Games**

Isaac and John, stranded on ice. K-i-l-l-i-n-g. First comes death, then comes transformation, then comes a whole crap-ton of necromorphs. Set to release on February 5, *Dead Space 3* is the first co-op venture for the series, which many people worry is a step too far away from the survival horror. Past games have showed us Isaac Clark is losing his mind a little bit, and it appears his new partner is as well. The *Dead Space: Liberation* graphic novel set to release alongside the game will shed light on John Carver's situation—how he ends up with Isaac and why he's out for revenge.

Fist of the North Star
Ken's Rage 2

Format **PS3** ETA **TBD 2013**
Pub **Tecmo Koei** Dev **Koei**

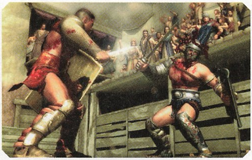
Ken is back and full of rage again. *Ken's Rage 2* features new story, but much of it retells events from the first game, along with new content adapted from the manga.



Sly Cooper Thieves in Time

Format **PS3** ETA **February 2013**
Pub **SCEA** Dev **Sanzaru Games**

Coming out on February 5, the same day as *Dead Space 3, Thieves in Time* couldn't be a more different title. It's time to meet Sly's ancestors as we travel through time to solve puzzles to restore the *Thievius Raccoonus*.



Spartacus: Legends

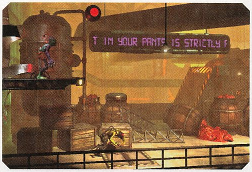
Format **PSN** ETA **TBD 2013**
Pub **Ubisoft** Dev **Kung Fu Factory**

The hit Starz show *Spartacus* is getting its own free-to-play fighting game. We'll be able to head into the arena as characters from the show or gladiators of our own design, and take on friends in offline or online multiplayer.

Mass Effect Trilogy

Format **PS3** ETA **TBD 2013**
Pub **Electronic Arts** Dev **BioWare**

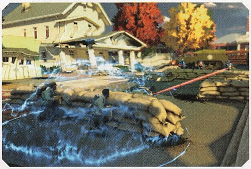
There's no confirmed release date yet, but *Mass Effect 1* will make its first PS3 appearance in the collection. For those who already own *2* and *3*, the original will also be available via PSN.



Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee New 'n' Tasty

Format **PSN/Vita** ETA **TBD 2013**
Pub **Oddworld Inhabitants** Dev **Just Add Water**

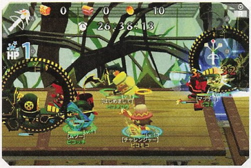
New 'n' Tasty is a re-imagining of *Abe's Oddyssee* featuring 3D environments, redesigned levels, and a new engine, that brings the classic into the now.



XCOM

Format **TBD** ETA **TBD 2013**
Pub **2K Games** Dev **2K Marin**

The *XCOM* FPS may no longer be an FPS. 2K is currently considering making it into a third-person squad shooter for the PSN. This might be the right move in the wake of *Enemy Unknown's* critical success.



Picotto Knights

Format **Vita** ETA **TBD 2013**
Pub **GungHo Online Ent.** Dev **Team Gajet/Game Arts**

The adorable free-to-play sidescroller, *Picotto Knights,* is on its way to the U.S. We'll be able to customize our character's appearance and weapon set and head online in four-player co-op.

Painkiller Hell & Damnation

Format **PS3** ETA **January 2013**
Pub **Nordic Games** Dev **The Farm 51**

Making use of the Unreal 3 engine, *Hell & Damnation* offers the same fast-paced FPS action as the original *Painkiller*. Daniel Garner must fight his way through demon hordes as he attempts to escape Purgatory.

Sasquatch
Jedah

Darkstalkers Resurrection

Format **PSN** ETA **TBD 2013**
Pub **Capcom** Dev **Iron Galaxy Studios**

Darkstalkers Resurrection will contain *Darkstalkers 3* and *Night Warriors: Darkstalkers Revenge*. New additions have been made to the fighting franchise including Trophies, new modes, and plenty of unlockables.

Gut Reaction

What's strong and what's wrong

▲ Law of Gravity
Keiichiro Toyama–director of *Gravity Rush*–says he will "do his best on a sequel." Good enough for us.

▲ Double Rainbow
The part-strategy RPG *Rainbow Moon* is making its way onto Vita. It's expected sometime in 2013.

▲ Party Like a...
A Rockstar *L.A. Noire*, *Red Dead*, *Liberty City*, and *Midnight Club* bundle is coming for $60.

▼ Epic Adios
Uber dev Cliff Blezinski said goodbye to Epic Games. There's no word on his next destination.

▼ Package Deal
The UK has begun talking about a PS3/Vita bundle, but so far there are no plans for this in the U.S.

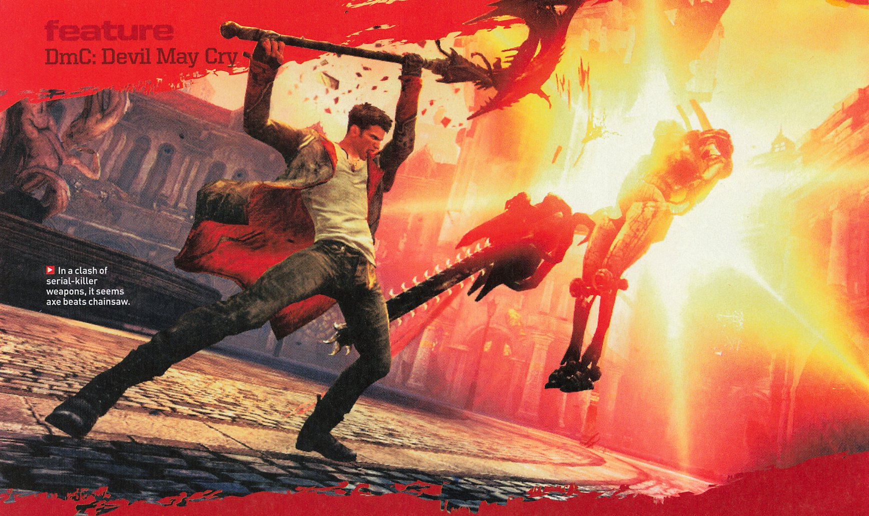
▼ Not Yet
PS Vita price cuts are rumored to be under discussion, but it's unlikely to happen this year.

HEAVEN OR HELL

Format **PS3** ETA **January 2013** Pub **Capcom** Dev **Ninja Theory**

Like its hybrid angel-demon hero, *DmC: Devil May Cry* is caught between clashing concepts: old versus new, east versus west, fan expectation versus developer vision. But also like Dante, *DmC* looks poised to emerge as something much stronger than the conflicts that surround it...

By Mikel Reparaz



In a clash of serial-killer weapons, it seems axe beats chainsaw.

Apart from its face, the portrait is pristine. Considering that it's been hanging under a rotting roof, exposed to the elements for who knows how many years, it's impressive that the only damage to its subject—a man in an elegant red jacket and partial armor, sword held proudly with its point resting on the floor—is that his face has been torn away. Somehow, though, its absence only makes him seem more familiar. Sparda—the demon knight who, in another reality, once betrayed his own kind to save humanity and benevolently rule the world—has a face that's seldom seen, and his appearance is rarely consistent when it is. Knowing what he looks like right off the bat would be... *anticlimactic*.

Besides, we can get an idea from the faces of his not-quite-identical sons. One of them, Vergil, heads a group called The Order—and while he's kept his identity mostly under wraps, his masked alter-ego has been declared a terrorist by the demons who secretly run the world. The other is Dante, who now stands before his father's portrait in the ruins of his family home, an abandoned mansion called Paradise. Rebellious, violent, and angry, Dante's battered his way through life with no memory of his family, having been separated from them at age seven and stricken with amnesia. But now he's being hunted by demons for reasons he doesn't fully understand, and the identity of his parents—one a demon, the other an angel—has suddenly become important. And as he steps closer to the portrait, the memories start creeping back.

No sooner do the words, "My dad?" leave Dante's lips than all hell breaks loose. The floor starts to buckle and crack. Twisted, skeletal creatures climb out of the fissures. The words "FOUND YOU" splash across the walls in enormous white letters, and as the soundtrack erupts with roaring guitars, the monsters advance, their spiked, clublike arms poised to strike. Oh, it's on now.

Rebellion Has a Soundtrack

DmC's new aesthetic doesn't stop at visuals and gameplay. Ninja Theory also wanted to create a unique sound to accompany the new Dante, so it recruited outside help: Atlanta-based Norwegian industrial band Combichrist (pictured), and Dutch electronica outfit Noisia, who between them composed nearly the entire soundtrack.

"We had an initial brief that we wanted to keep the DNA of the *DMC* sound, but we wanted to make it more appealing to a western audience," says Tom Colvin, *DmC's* audio lead. "We wanted someone that was crossing the divide between guitars and punky aggressiveness, and a more digital area. We decided that instead of just having a single artist, it would be better to have two from that area. Combichrist was the more aggro part of it. Noisia was the more epic, electronic part.

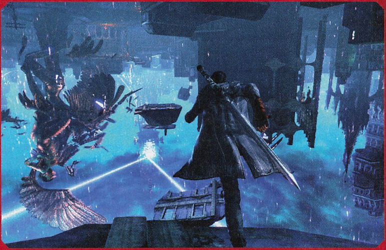
"We went into it with a lot of detail, making sure they understood the pacing of the game and what's appropriate," says Colvin. "The only bit we did in-house was the cutscene work. That was done in more of a traditional, thematic way. We devised 10 or 12 themes and said, 'We need a theme for Vergil and the hints of distrust you get between Vergil and Dante.' Even early on, you never really feel like they get on. There's a theme for that."

Hidden Treasure

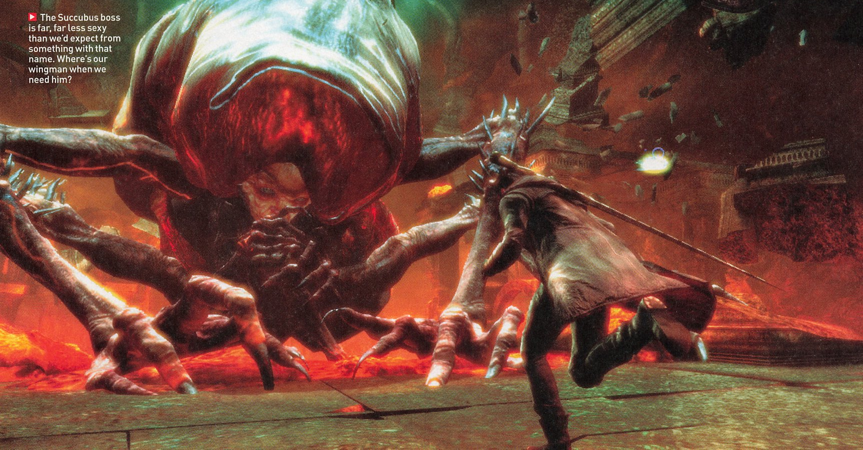
DmC's chapters are mostly linear, but they're filled with semi-hidden paths and hard-to-find corridors. Most of these lead to small rooms that contain Lost Souls (who can be "freed" for better rewards at the level's end) and smashable cocoons filled with Red Orbs. But others contain keys that can open special doors to secret missions–short, timed trials that challenge us to defeat monsters under special conditions (i.e. enemies will only take damage when airborne). This means *DmC's* secret missions are much easier to find than those in previous games, which could only be accessed by interacting with seemingly random bits of scenery–but they're also much more *fun* to find, especially since some of them are hidden behind obstacles that can only be smashed by weapons found later in the game, giving us an incentive to revisit early levels with a much more powerful Dante.

The first few go down easy. Wielding Dante's sword, Rebellion, we lunge into their midst with a classic Stinger thrust, sending the cannon-fodder flying. There's one still on its feet, so we smack it skyward with Rebellion before leaping after it, rapidly slashing at the monster in midair until it explodes in a shower of Red Orbs—*DmC's* currency. A few are still moving, so we unload with a spinning midair burst from Dante's twin pistols, Ebony and Ivory (just to keep the combo going), before landing and laying into the survivors with a chain of quick, brutal sword strikes. It's enough to send our Style meter skyrocketing, and we're rewarded with a bellowed "SAVAGE!" as our nonstop combos bring it to S-rank.

Once the small fry have been put down, something new crawls onto the scene: a Death Knight, with a skull face, a shield, and a huge, folding blade where one of its arms should be. Its "sword" is easy to parry or dodge, but the shield turns out to be a bigger



▲ Some of our favorite levels take place in the shifting, upside-down reflection of a media skyscraper overlooking a body of water.



▶ The Succubus boss is far, far less sexy than we'd expect from something with that name. Where's our wingman when we need him?

problem. However, dodging behind the monster exposes its back to Rebellion's slashes, quickly proving that it isn't much tougher than the rest after all. After we've humiliated it as badly as we did its friends, Dante touches Sparda's portrait, and it grants him something that'll help us deal with shielded creatures a little more effectively: a huge axe called Arbiter. By holding R2, we can effortlessly switch between Rebellion's fast strikes and Arbiter's slower, armor-breakingly powerful ones, bringing a new level of destructive variety to our combos. The demons haven't got a prayer.

This is *DmC*, the incarnation of *Devil May Cry* that the Internet loves to hate, but which—if our in-depth hands-on with the first 10 missions (roughly the first half of the game) is anything to go by—might actually be the best entry in the series to date. And this is only the beginning.

Starting Fresh

DmC is a new, edgier take on the *Devil May Cry* universe—a fact that hasn't escaped the series' more vocal fans, who in the two years since its unveiling have voiced everything from outrage over Dante's black hair and use of profanity, to concerns that developer Ninja Theory doesn't "get" what makes the series great. As the scene above suggests, though, *DmC* isn't throwing out *Devil May Cry*'s traditions in its pursuit of edginess—it's just adapting them, with an obvious reverence for the franchise (and no small amount of input from Capcom Japan), to create something almost entirely new.

"With Capcom, we never set out to add *Devil May Cry 5* to the series," says the Ninja Theory co-founder Tameem Antoniades. "Our goal was always to kind of create a new series that could sit alongside it, and had a different tone, and a different take, and a different world. It's best to think of it as a new world, a new series—a new Dante, even—and not do a like-for-like comparison with the classic Dante."

"[Capcom Japan was] fully on board with it," adds Alex Jones, *DmC's* senior producer at Capcom. "The redesign of Dante, specifically, was something they were intensively involved in. It really does reflect their vision for this Dante as much as it reflects Ninja Theory's vision."

"We're telling a story of how he becomes the character he ends up being," says Antoniades. "There's a reason behind the hair being different, and that leads somewhere."

> "There's a heavy element of satire. It's not subtle satire. It's very on-the-nose satire, inspired by the world we live in."
>
> *–Tameem Antoniades, Ninja Theory co-founder and CEO*

Judging by the time we've spent with *DmC*, it leads somewhere very interesting and gives Dante something he's never really had before—a detailed backstory. *DmC* unfolds in a world that, like our own, is plagued with a global epidemic of obesity, debt, and insidiously awful television. These problems have been engineered by a global conspiracy of demons in human guise—more specifically by their king, the gangster-like Mundus—to entrap and enslave humanity.

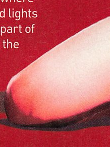
"There's a heavy element of satire," says Antoniades. "It's not subtle satire. It's very on-the-nose satire, inspired by the world we live in—the world we want to rebel against.

"When *Devil May Cry* first came out, it touched on a lot of things in popular culture that were cool, and that other games didn't explore," Antoniades continues. "Our approach was to think about how we could create a new world, where instead of drawing from Japanese anime, we would draw from the kind of influences we're familiar with, like action movies and music, and then incorporate those into the game and recreate Dante through that. Key to that was Rebellion being the name of his sword. We put that at the heart of what this game is about. It's about rebellion in all its shapes and forms."

This new Dante, for his part, is a Nephilim—the spawn of a demon (Sparda) and an angel (his mother, Eva). He's also one of the few people who can see the demons for what they are (as well as the subliminal, *They Live*-inspired exhortations to complacency and submission they like to plaster all over everything), and he's been fighting them on their home turf—a strange, twisted version of the real world called Limbo—for most of his life. These fights tend to be misinterpreted by others as violence against human authority figures, but the aim isn't to create a question of whether Dante might be crazy. The demons are very real, as are the powers Dante manifests when he's dragged into Limbo to confront them. And while he comes off like an angry, bird-flipping teenager sometimes, this Dante is far from troubled or brooding; *that* role is filled by Kat, Vergil's psychic, demon-sensing sidekick, who's also Dante's only guide through Limbo. Dante, by contrast, has a cocky grin and smirking swagger that make him feel a lot like the wisecracking demon hunter we've always known—pricklier and more human, sure, but just as confident, and just as resilient. (Although to be fair, we haven't seen him get run through by any swords just yet. Give it time, though.)

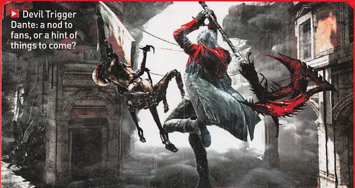
A World (Torn) Apart

Whatever fans eventually think of Ninja Theory's take on Dante and his world, it's already clear that *DmC* has it where it counts: gameplay. Its levels—which so far include twisted Limbo versions of a boardwalk amusement park; Dante's family mansion; the monster-infested alleys of a European-looking city; a factory for Virility, a soft drink with a dark secret; a nightclub where throbbing beats and lights become a physical part of the landscape; and the upside-down reflection of a mass-media network's tower headquarters



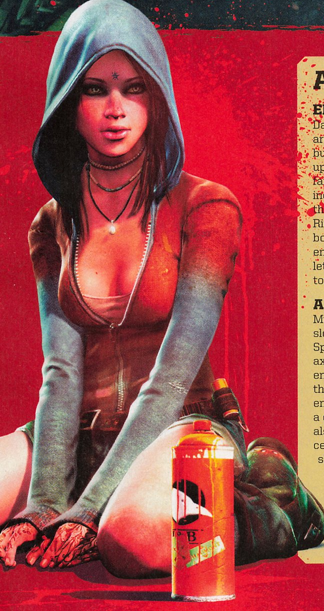
Bring Out the Beast

If we *really* want to do some damage—or we're just in a tight spot—we can quickly turn the tables by activating Devil Trigger. We don't earn the ability until the game's ninth chapter, but once we do, activating it briefly tosses our enemies into the air while our meter runs down, enabling Dante—now with a bright red jacket and white hair—to cut them to ribbons while they float helplessly.



Devil Trigger Dante: a nod to fans, or a hint of things to come?

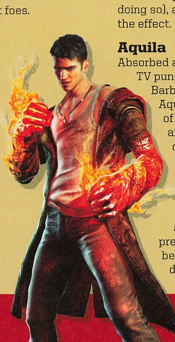
These fat creeps can kill us fast if we're not careful —but like all fat creeps, they have a hidden weak spot.



A Hunter's Arsenal

Ebony & Ivory
Dante's pistols aren't that powerful, but they can be upgraded with fancy moves—including the charged Ricoshot, which bounces between enemies, and Rainstorm, which lets him spin in midair to unleash torrents of bullets down at foes.

Arbiter
Much stronger (and slower) than Rebellion, Sparda's huge demonic axe is ideal for stunning enemies, breaking through shields, and ending combos with a decisive smash. It's also the key to opening certain doors, a trait it shares with the other sub-weapons.



Eryx
A pair of demonic gauntlets earned by defeating the boss who guards the Virility factory, Eryx lets Dante chain together quick, powerful punches—and its uppercut, when fully charged, can knock some larger enemies flat.

Osiris
A gift from Dante's late mother, Eva, this fast, relatively weak angelic weapon makes a perfect counterpoint to Arbiter. It also grows stronger as we use it (giving us a reason to keep doing so), although getting hit cancels the effect.

Aquila
Absorbed after we defeat obnoxious TV pundit/literal talking head Bob Barbas, the spinning angelic Aquila blades cut a huge ring of destruction around Dante, and can stun enemies with continuous multi-hit attacks that set them up for greater punishment.

Rebellion
Dante's default blade, able to execute quick, precise strikes while still being powerful enough to disembowel any enemy.

Ever seen the "Fry and the Slurm Factory" episode of *Futurama*? Succubus is like that, but with swearing.

(in reality a secret prison for demon dissidents)—are inventively designed, and full of unique elements and hidden areas. And because they're in Limbo, where the laws of physics don't quite apply, they rarely keep the same shape for long.

Paradise, for example, begins as a normal-enough abandoned mansion—albeit one covered in the strange obsidian growths and black creeper vines that seem to run through most of Limbo. As the level progresses and Dante learns more about his past, the house gives way to open, soaring dreamscapes and ultimately comes apart at the seams, creating huge rifts and floating platforms that Dante has to navigate. Sometimes, it seems as though Limbo itself is actively trying to kill him; after all, it's never entirely clear who's writing the angry messages that plaster themselves across the landscape ("DIE," "KILL HIM," etc.), who's making the landscape buckle and tear apart just to throw obstacles into Dante's path, or who's introducing all these giant gears and flaming subway trains for us to knock our enemies into.

Fortunately for us, all this world-reshaping interference just means more interesting vistas to explore—and more enjoyable ways to explore them. As Limbo becomes progressively crazier, it starts to offer up increasingly clever platforming puzzles, most of which require use of the Ophion, a sort of chain-whip that lets Dante perform an Angel Lift (yanking him toward certain blue-lit objects) or a Demon Pull (which hauls certain red-lit objects toward him). These get more complicated, too—while we're initially tugging platforms out of walls and zipping through grapple points, we soon get the Angel Boost ability, which lets Dante dash forward in midair. It's immediately incorporated into the Ophion pull/lift puzzles, making it a vital part of getting through Limbo's soaring labyrinths of floating platforms.

Collaborative Combat

The Angel Lift and Demon Pull can also be used on enemies, enabling us to easily wrench enemies close (or pull Dante close to them) to extend combos, tug away shields, or zero-in on flying enemies. And that brings us to where *DmC* really shines: Combat. The result of the combined efforts of Ninja Theory and the staff at Capcom Japan—including some of *Devil May Cry's* original creators—Dante's new fighting system feels lighter, more responsive, and much more flexible than previous entries in the series.

"We've been coming [to Ninja Theory's studio], on average, probably one week out of the month for almost the entirety of the development cycle," says Jones. "Easily 75 percent of that time was spent just with Capcom Japan talking with the core combat designers here about, 'Here's our philosophy of combat. Here's how you teach people to use something. Here's how we ramp difficulty.' Even right down to the nitty-gritty of shaving frame counts and putting hit stops on things, and 'No, you want the sound to come one frame after the impact.' That kind of intensive collaboration is just not your standard external development model."

That level of attention to detail shows, and not just in the feel of how Dante handles Rebellion, either. The available pool of combo chains is enormous, thanks to a deep upgrade system, two melee attack buttons (instead of one attack and one "style" button, as in *DMC3* and *4*), and sub-weapons that we can quickly switch between mid-chain just by holding in a trigger button. Where previous entries treated weapons as separate entities with their own distinct combo trees, *DmC* brings them all together, making them all instantly accessible (meaning we never have to pull up a menu to switch them out) and enabling us to use any combination of them to perform our combos.

With judicious use of the

Do It with Style

DmC's Style meter, like those in previous games, judges us on how many different moves we can squeeze into our combos, meaning that spamming the same move is a sure way to send it plummeting. Continually switching up our attacks instead will send it ratcheting up from "Cruel!" to "Anarchic!" all the way to the coveted "SSadistic!" grade, ultimately earning us better rewards—as well as being a lot more fun.

DmC's version also brings something new, aside from the edgier grade names: it lists exactly which move we just did and how many points it netted us.

"One piece of feedback that came up a lot was that people didn't understand what a D or an S rank did, what each move was worth, that their attacks deteriorated in value when repeated, and so on," says combat designer Rahni Tucker. "Our hope was that if people understood why and how they were scoring points, they'd become more invested in trying to score well."

> "When you watch hardcore *DMC* players, you see those guys doing amazing things, and to people who don't understand how it's executed, it just looks like black magic."
>
> *–Rahni Tucker, Combat Designer*

Build a Better Dante

Upgrades in *DmC* work a little differently than they have in previous games; while Red Orbs are still awarded for killing enemies, they're now used only to buy items, like health-restoring Vital Stars and Dante-resurrecting Gold Orbs, at Divinity Statues (read: shops) or between missions. To add new moves to our arsenal, we'll need upgrade points, which are awarded for especially stylish combos and for finishing missions with a high Style ranking. Each move costs one point, and each weapon has somewhere between nine and 18 available moves—some given automatically with the weapon, others unlocked by upgrading. Even Dante's basic abilities can be upgraded, with enhancements to his Ophion moves, special dodges, and the ability to use enemies as a springboard for jumping (in addition to his regular double-jump, which comes standard).

Better still, we can re-spec our move list, rearranging points to re-lock abilities we don't want and open up ones we do—and if we're not sure whether we actually want a move, we can try it out in a special training space before buying it and getting back to the action.

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triggers and D-pad, it's easy (for example) to start in with a couple quick strikes with Rebellion before chaining into a whirling lift attack from Osiris (Dante's angelic scythe). Without missing a beat, we can then juggle our enemy in midair with a quick pistol volley (not for too long, though, or the Style meter will start to run down) before launching ourselves toward them with the Angel Lift and executing a carefully timed punch that knocks them even higher. As they rocket upward, we can yank them back in with a Demon Pull, slam them into the ground with a downward strike from the Arbiter and—provided they're not already in pieces—launch a self-sustaining, multi-hit strike with the buzzsaw-like Aquila blades before switching over to the Eryx magma gauntlets to pound the last shreds of life out of them.

"In *DmC*, combat is what it's really all about," says Antoniades. "You get the combat wrong, and the game will fall. A theory that [Capcom Japan] imprinted on us was, whatever the player wants to do, they should be able to do, so you can express yourself through the different weapons and styles against different enemies. It's been a very long development on just the combat, just kind of getting that responsiveness, that depth as well, so that even if you think you've mastered it, someone else will come along and show you how it's really played."

There's a huge degree of possibility here, and—once we've earned an assortment of weapons and unlocked a handful of cool moves—there's a real, palpable sense of power. It's not just that it's easy to swap out weapons and whale on hordes of enemies—it's that it's hugely fun and satisfying to do so, and switching constantly between varied armaments and combos makes Dante's endless, fluid strikes fascinating to watch. We can carefully experiment and plan out chained attacks to devastating effect, or we can mash on buttons and still get pretty impressive results.

"When you watch hardcore *DMC* players, you see those guys doing amazing things—like epic air juggling—and to people who don't understand how that's executed, it just looks like black magic," says combat designer Rahni Tucker. "I wanted to take that amazing feeling and allow a wider audience to experience it. That said, we knew right from the get-go that we absolutely had to live up to the depth in combat of the original *DMC* series. So the biggest goal was to bring that awesome stylish combat to a wider audience, without sacrificing depth, or diminishing the skill of the hardcore player."

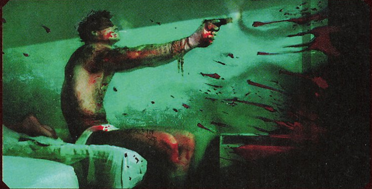
Devil's Bestiary

That shouldn't give the impression *DmC's* combat is necessarily easy, however. While the standard enemy grunts are simple enough to dispatch, the roster of creepy porcelain-doll-like baddies quickly ramps up with tougher foes, and if we get too lost in the reverie of combat, it's easy to lose sight of the pounding Dante's health bar takes. Strong monsters like the Death Knight quickly become standard, and they're soon joined by elementally charged versions that can only be harmed by demonic or angelic weapons, as well as by enormous fat brutes with spiked fists and baby-doll heads; bestial ratlike predators; chainsaw-wielding monsters that become nigh-invulnerable when they rev their saws; floating cherub-things who keep targeting us from outside our line of sight; and sexy blue Witches who can project shields around other enemies, just to list a few. There's a steady supply of new monsters as the game progresses, and whenever they attack in waves (which is most of the time), the game does an excellent job of trotting out a mix of monsters balanced specifically to keep us on our toes.

Basic grunts are far from the only threat, of course; *DmC* also features some impressively huge, multi-stage boss battles. There are just three in the game's first half: the gigantic, ape-like Hunter at the end of the first stage; the slug-looking Succubus that sits at the heart of the Virility factory; and Bob Barbas, the public face of the Raptor News Network, who is in reality a massive, leering head apparently inspired by the MCP from *TRON*. Like all good bosses, they tend to fall back on predictable patterns that should be instantly recognizable to anyone who plays videogames, making them relatively simple to defeat once we know what we're doing. But as massive, creatively scripted set-pieces, they're among the highlights of what we've played—and their foul-mouthed exchanges with Dante,

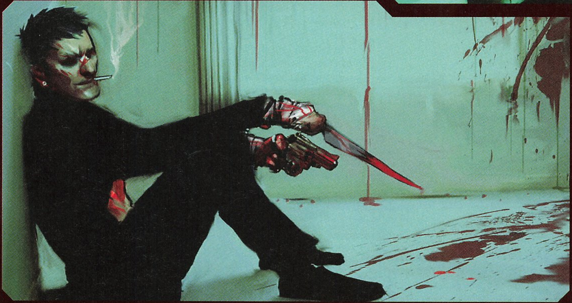
The battle with the Hunter teaches us how to parry effectively.

Out With The Old



Dante's new look wasn't always part of Ninja Theory's plans; in fact, early iterations looked a lot closer to the demon slayer's "normal" look. "For me, to work on a character that already exists is difficult," says Alessandro Taini, *DmC's* art director. "I was like, 'Oh, I need to do this bare-chested guy with a leather jacket and white hair.'"

It wasn't long before Ninja Theory realized it had the freedom to take a new stylistic direction, especially after Capcom pushed the studio to apply its own style. "They said, 'Look, we could make a *Devil May Cry 5* ourselves. We don't need you to do it. We need something different from you that we can't do in Japan,'" says Taini. "After that, I was really happy to know we could actually try something different. The first approach was to try to get the same style and the same thing but slightly more European, but the main thing was that we needed something else. We need something different, and there needs to be a reason why it's different as well."



Gradually, the designs moved away from Dante's "normal" look and closer to the punky misfit we know today—although as these concepts show, the final iteration is far from the edgiest one Ninja Theory came up with.

Whether fast or slow, Dante's weapons all have a satisfying heft to them.

Of the bosses we've met so far, Succubus is the only one who seemed surprised to see Dante.

while not precisely intelligent, are hard not to laugh at.

Bosses and all, our trip through the first 10 chapters took us just under six hours, meaning we can probably expect the final game to be around twice as long—although that's not taking into account all the secret missions, hidden areas, and other incentives to go back and replay stages once we've "finished" them. More to the point, those six hours were incredibly fun, and that comes without any qualifications—never once did we hit an area that felt slow, or repetitive, or in any way like a slog. We can't yet confirm the same for the game's second half—and it's worth pointing out that plenty of promising games take a downturn around that point—but judging from what we've experienced so far, it seems *Devil May Cry* fans will have very little to complain about once *DmC* finally arrives in their hands.

Too Easy?

For truly hardcore Dante fans—the ones who soldiered through the original cut of *Devil May Cry 3* and have demanded crushing difficulty ever since—*DmC's* standard Devil Hunter difficulty level (in its current state, at least) will probably feel just a little too forgiving. Those players will want to jump straight to Nephilim difficulty, which feels more in line with previous *DMCs*—or, if that's not enough, simply grit their teeth until they can unlock one of the *real* difficulty levels, like Son of Sparda or Dante Must Die! And if those *still* aren't sufficiently punishing, then Heaven Or Hell (in which Dante and his enemies can be killed in one hit) or Hell And Hell (enemies are normal strength, Dante dies in one hit) should please even the most self-hating masochists.

Just for reference, this is not actually what "emo" looks like. *At all.*

What GIVES?

Beware of geeks bearing gifts...

When it comes to giving the perfect holiday gift, the key is knowing the recipient's likes, dislikes, and personality. Which begs the question: Does the PTOM staff really know each other *at all*? Join us for our annual office gift exchange and discover whether we were really paying attention during all those late hours we spent working with each other. Maybe you'll even find a gift or two to your liking in the process.

To Roger

From Dan

LEGO Star Wars Sith Fury-class Interceptor
$90 | lego.com

"Roger can go on and on for *hours* about how anything beyond the original *Star Wars* trilogy has been sacrilegiously tainted and exploited. But combine LEGOs and *Star Wars* and even our jaded Jedi can't resist the power of the dark side."

From Scott

Pelican i1075 HardCase for iPad
$85 | pelican.com

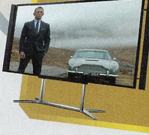
"Sooo I kind of figured out that Roger planned on getting me a travel bag, so it seemed only fair that I return the favor and grab him this handsome iPad case. I mean, he does have kids, after all. Some water/bullet/child-proof protection seems like a worthy investment."

Roger's Essentials

GAME
Gravity Rush
$40 | amazon.com

BLU-RAY
Princess Bride: 25th Anniversary Edition
$20 | amazon.com

SOCK FILLER
The Hobbit: Pocket Edition
$15 | thinkgeek.com



Roger's Dream Gift

Sony XBR-84X900 84-inch 4K LED TV
$25,000 | store.sony.com

"Yes, it's a TV that costs as much as a car. But with 4K (3840 x 2160) image quality that's four times clearer than full HD, the XBR-84X900 is the TV I want to be buried with when my time comes. Unless next year's model is better..."

From Mikel

SodaStream Revolution
$200 | sodastreamusa.com

"Never mind the idea of saving money, reducing waste, or controlling what goes into your soft drinks—Roger has *kids*. And when you're a kid, is there anything more magical than being able to make your own soda at home? No! There isn't."

From Anne

Necomimi Brainwave Cat Ears
$100 | store.necomimi.com

"These ears kinda of freak me out, but Roger likes a lot of things that frighten me. Also, now I always know what mood my boss is in. It's nice to know when I should avoid his desk."

NERF Vortex Pyragon Blaster
$40 | hasbrotoyshop.com/nerf/

"Arming Anne with a variety of (theoretically) non-lethal weapons has become something of an annual tradition here at PTOM, but this year, I think NERF has outdone itself. An automatic, pump-action blaster with a 40-round drum magazine? We're all doomed."

From Scott

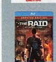
Anne's Dream Gift

Organic Harmony in Gold
$6.8 million | shapeaudio.com

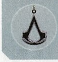
"Yeah, this single speaker is worth more than I will ever possess but when I saw the words 'solid gold,' I knew it would haunt my dreams forever. Each one is 18K gold and built to the customer's order."

Anne's Essentials

GAME
Okami HD
$20 | PSN



BLU-RAY
The Raid: Redemption
$25 | amazon.com



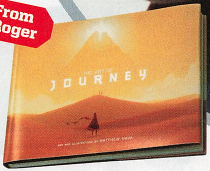
SOCK FILLER
Assassin's Creed Necklace
$12 | etsy.com/shop/licketycut

NERF
VORTEX

From Roger

The Art of Journey Book
$60 | amazon.com

"Don't fixate on the fact that Anne's gift costs a couple hundred dollars less than the ones I got everybody else. Because, really, how can you put a price on art? It challenges the intellect and rejuvenates the soul...and saves me $200 on Anne's gift."



To Anne

Shop
Games
Apps
Books
Music
Videos
THE HUNGER GAMES

From Mikel

Kindle Fire HD
$200-$500 | amazon.com

"Anne reads a lot of comics, and comics can take up a *lot* of space—so Amazon's relatively inexpensive tablet gives her a convenient way to read them (and PTOM) without risking exposure on her own episode of *Hoarders*."

From Dan

Bamboo iPad Cooking Stand
$30 | greatusefulstuff.com

"No, I'm not stereotyping PTOM's only female staffer—Anne really does enjoy the culinary arts. This cooking stand keeps her recipe-laden iPad safe and secure while she's baking holiday cookies for her deserving co-workers. Nomnomnom."

To Mikel

From Roger

Batman vs. Bane 1:6 Scale Statue

$325 | dccomics.com/collectibles

"One look at Mikel's desk and it's easy to see that he's a fan of comic and games figurines. And like Bane who can hoist mighty Batman above his head, Mikel lifts PTOM to even greater editorial heights—or he's the harbinger of its doom."

From Anne

NEOGEO X Gold

$200 | neogeox.com

"Mikel is a fan of kicking it old school. When he heard about the NEOGEO X Gold Limited Edition set I'm pretty sure I actually caught him drooling. Getting it for him was an easy decision."

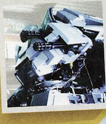
Mikel's Essentials

GAME
Assassin's Creed III
$60 | amazon.com

BLU-RAY
Cabin in the Woods
$35 | amazon.com

SOCK FILLER
PixelBlocks Dream Set
$30 | amazon.com

Mikel's Dream Gift



Kuratas giant robot

$1.35 million | suidobashijuko.jp

"While it's really more of a hydraulics-equipped art-car than an actual, lumbering giant robot, the Kuratas is probably the closest any of us will get to piloting an actual mech in our lifetimes. And it's safer than a flying car. Probably."

From Dan

Sony A37 Camera with 18-55mm Lens

$600 | store.sony.com

"I frequently ask Mikel to take photos when he visits game developers for PTOM features. Giving him this 16.1 MP DSLR means never having to grind my teeth again when he replies 'Sure, I'll just take some shots with my cell phone.'"

From Scott

NECA Ezio Auditore RolePlay Gauntlet Replica

$40 | gamestop.com

"Mikel is seriously the most devout *Assassin's Creed* fan I know. And sure, grown men aren't 'supposed' to play with fake plastic weapons, but this spring-loaded hidden blade actually *works*. I mean, how cool is that?! I just hope he doesn't try to assassinate me with it."

etón Rukus Solar

$150 | shopetoncorp.com

"If there's anything a person *has* to know about Scott, it's that he's a lover of music. The Rukus packs a surprising amount of sound for its size and the solar panels mean Scott can bring this baby anywhere."

From Anne

From Dan

SYNC by 50 Headphones

$400 | smsby50.com

"A quality pair of headphones is a no brainer gift for our resident music aficionado. Scott can enjoy the SYNC's wireless connectivity and I can enjoy his endless microanalysis of the unit's acoustic envelope. On second thought..."

Scott's Dream Gift

Pinball Machines

Starting at $3,000
thepinballcompany.com

"When I was a kid, all I ever really wanted was my own personal pinball machine. Nothing seemed cooler, perhaps because nothing seemed more unattainable. As an 'adult,' it still blows me away that I can just *buy* a pinball machine...for, like, several thousand dollars."

To Scott

From Mikel

Lazer Tag 2 Blaster Battle Pack

$75 | lazertag.com

"Scott's desk directly faces mine at the office, so a pair of Lazer Tag guns could really spice up our daily glowering contests with symbolic violence. Unless he breaks my heart by giving the second gun to someone else, of course."

From Roger

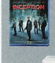
U140 Urban Elite Tablet Backpack

$260 | pelican.com

"I rely on young adventurer/editor Scott to travel the world for PTOM to seek out the world's finest coffee beans...er, cutting edge PlayStation info. Regardless, this waterproof and crushproof case will safeguard the tools of his trade."

Scott's Essentials

GAME
Borderlands 2
$60 | amazon.com



BLU-RAY
Inception
$15 | amazon.com

SOCK FILLER
Cards Against Humanity
$25 | cardsagainsthumanity.com

To Dan

PS3 Uncharted 3 Game of the Year Bundle

$270 | store.sony.com

"Dan had been working his magic as PTOM's art director for over a half-year when he revealed this shocker: He doesn't own a PS3. That's like working at Disneyland but never getting to go on the rides! Welcome to the family, Dan."

SONY
GAME OF THE YEAR EDITION
UNCHARTED 3
DRAKE'S DECEPTION
OVER $70 SAVINGS!

From Roger

Bond 50: The Complete 22 Film Collection

$300 | 007.com/bond-50-on-blu-ray

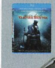
"Whatever their perceived shortcomings, however awful some of them might be, James Bond films remain some of the most watchable, iconic pieces of cinema ever recorded. And Dan strikes me as the kind of guy who can appreciate 22 extremely watchable movies."

From Mikel

CELEBRATING FIVE DECADES OF
BOND 007
BOND 50
1964
GOLDFINGER
1965
THUNDERBALL

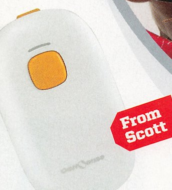
Dan's Essentials

GAME
Call of Duty: Black Ops II
$60 | amazon.com



BLU-RAY
Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter
$40 | amazon.com

SOCK FILLER
Klarus P1A Tactical LED Flashlight
$45 | thinkgeek.com



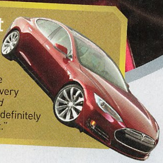
From Scott

GolfSense

$130 | golfsense.me

"Heading outdoors doesn't mean you have to stop being a nerd. Now whenever Dan hits the links, he can strap the handy GolfSense sensor to his glove, sync it with his iPhone, and receive instant feedback on his swing. Er, not that he needs the help."

Dan's Dream Gift



Tesla Model S

$50,000 | teslamotors.com

"Don't think of this as an expensive gift, think of it as the most inexpensive version of a very expensive gift. See? Thrifty *and* environmentally conscious—I definitely deserve to top Santa's Nice list."

From Anne

Skullcandy SLYR Gaming Headset

$80 | skullcandy.com

"When I saw that Roger gave Dan a fancy new PS3, I knew exactly what to get him to start him down the road toward a gaming addiction. With this headset Dan can yell at people online just as much as I do!"

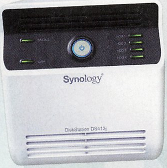
Game Gear!

Mega Man Scent Blasters
$3 | thinkgeek.com
"Make your car smell like videogames with Mega Man and Proto Man air fresheners."

Mega Man Bobble Budds
$11 | amazon.com
"These cute bobbly friends are the perfect desk accouterments. We feel incomplete without the whole set."

PS3 Fighting Stick Mini 3
$40 | stores.horiusa.com
"This cheap, mini fighting stick is perfect for beginners and fighters on the go."

Synology DiskStation DS413j
$400 | synology.com
"The DS413j has room for four drives (and up to 16TB of data) to hold all your movies, music, and photos."


Synology
DiskStation DS413j

FR-1 Steering Wheel
$65 | gioteck.com
"Sleek design and customizable sensitivity make this a must-have wheel for racing fans."

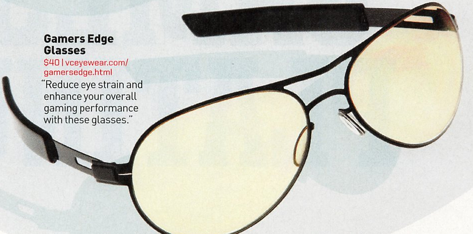
SONY
PS VITA
ASSASSIN'S CREED III
LIBERATION
LIMITED EDITION PLAYSTATION VITA BUNDLE
OVER $59 SAVINGS
Wi-Fi

Assassin's Creed: Liberation Vita Bundle
$250 | store.sony.com
"For the price of a regular Wi-Fi Vita, wouldn't you rather get a white system, a 4GB memory card, and *Assassin's Creed: Liberation*?"

Wonderbook: Book of Spells Move Bundle
$80 | store.sony.com
"The perfect bundle for a younger gamer, you get all the necessary Move peripherals, *Book of Spells*, and, of course, Wonderbook."

PS3
PlayStation Move
Wonderbook
BOOK OF SPELLS
FROM J.K. ROWLING

Gamers Edge Glasses
$40 | vceyewear.com/gamersedge.html
"Reduce eye strain and enhance your overall gaming performance with these glasses."



20 EASIEST GAMES to PLATINUM

1 ALONE IN THE DARK: INFERNO

Year **2008** Format **PS3** Developer **Eden Games** Trophies **50**

There's no shortage of puzzles to get your brain around in this paranormal adventure, and although you get the option to "fast forward" past them, you need to finish every episode without doing so to get all the Trophies. Just finish the episodes and make all the possible combinations of inventory items and the Platinum is yours. Which actually isn't as difficult as it sounds.

▲ Getting the *NCIS* Platinum: not nearly as tough as proper police forensics

2 NCIS: THE GAME

Year **2011** Format **PS3**
Developer **Ubisoft** Trophies **27**

This TV tie-in is ridiculously easy to complete, as there are only four cases to solve. The interface is fiddly but there are no missable Trophies, so by the time your investigation has concluded (around the five-hour mark) you'll have unlocked every accolade. Well done.

3 TV SUPERSTARS

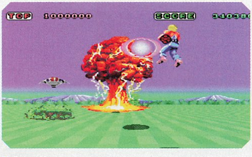
Year **2010** Format **PS3/PSN**
Developer **SCE Cambridge** Trophies **51**

It's easy to score well on the Move controlled TV events, though achieving great scores on the eight commercials requires more practice. Once all the individual show awards are unlocked you just need to grind for points until you top the A-List.

4 SEGA MEGA DRIVE ULTIMATE COLLECTION

Year **2009** Format **PS3** Developer
Backbone Entertainment Trophies **35**

Almost every game in this collection has a Trophy, and although most are pretty straightforward there are guides available to quickly mop them up. The only tough accolade is for completing Dr. Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine, requiring both skill and luck to defeat the Eggman's final stage.

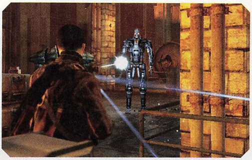


▲ *Space Harrier* is showing its age, but you need to play it for the Platinum.

5 TRINE 2

Year **2012** Format **PSN** Developer **Frozenbyte** Trophies **13**

Incredibly, you don't even need to complete the game to get every Trophy in this sidescrolling downloadable adventure– it's possible to have them all unlocked by the time you're merely halfway through the story. Simply replay chapter two of the game using just Amadeus the wizard and you'll receive your Platinum in a single session. Abracadabra!



Bag Platinum, and you "*won't* be back."

6 TERMINATOR SALVATION

Year **2009** Format **PS3**
Developer **GRIN** Trophies **12**

This lackluster film tie-in offers no challenge other than finishing its nine chapters. If you can look past the fact there are only four enemy types, one playthrough on hard gets you 100-percent completion.

7 KUNG FU PANDA 2

Year **2011** Format **PS3**
Developer **Griptonite** Trophies **44**

One playthrough with some requisite back-tracking is all you need to earn this Platinum (definitely under 10 hours of work). The toughest part is suffering through this ugly, buggy atrocity, which makes the painful experience seem much longer than it actually is. But you can stand a little suffering, can't you?

If you want fun or pleasure instead of Platinum, watch the *Kung Fu Panda 2* movie instead.

8 WWE LEGENDS OF WRESTLEMANIA

Year **2009** Format **PS3** Developer **Yuke's** Trophies **20**

With no restrictions on difficulty settings, netting all of *Wrestlemania's* virtual belts comes down to a simple grind through the different game modes. The main challenge is the final tier of Legend Killer mode, where you have to spend over an hour defeating 38 opponents in a row. It's worth it for that shiny reward though.

9 EYEPET

Year **2009** Format **PS3** Developer **SCE London** Trophies **35**

By exiting out of the game and manually moving your PS3's clock forward by 24 hours, you can magically (and very quickly) progress through all the daily challenges and Pet Reports with your virtual furry friend. Unlocking all of the prizes isn't difficult either, but be warned: it can become a rather time-consuming endeavour.

10 WANTED: WEAPONS OF FATE

Year **2009** Format **PS3**
Developer **GRIN** Trophies **51**

After finishing the game on "Assassin" and "The Killer" difficulties, you'd normally have to blitz through the whole thing another three times for additional completion awards. However, a glitch means you can skip from the first checkpoint to the final level, cutting out hours of playtime.

5 HARDEST PLATINUMS

Consider yourself hardcore? Then try these badboys.

1 Dark Souls

Surviving through to the very end of *Dark Souls* is a challenge in itself, but you'll need to do it twice before embarking on a third New Game++ playthrough to acquire all the rare weapons needed to get your hands on the hardest Trophy.

2 GTA IV

The online awards are the onion in the ointment here, as you have to form a team of skilled players to beat the harsh co-op mission target times. Then you need to invest in months of online grinding, to eventually amass a huge $5 million fortune.

3 Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2

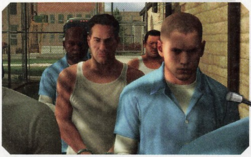
Potentially one of the most difficult games ever made, the biggest challenge is completing the co-op missions. Your A.I. partners fall off on harder difficulties, so you need to recruit an equally skilled online buddy to see victory.

4 Metal Gear Solid 4

Kojima's masterpiece has finally been patched for Trophies, but don't expect a Platinum anytime soon. Unlocking all the emblems requires eight playthroughs, meaning you'll know Snake's story inside out before success.

5 Gran Turismo 5

To reach the top of the Trophy podium, you need a gold in every race, license test, and special event. Even if you use B-Spec drivers to complete the endurance races, you still need to put in hundreds of hours of driving.



Keep hold of the soap in the shower and you'll have the Platinum in no time.

11 PRISON BREAK: THE CONSPIRACY

Year **2010** Format **PS3** Developer **ZootFly** Trophies **46**

It is possible to grab every award on a single playthrough of this TV series link-up, but the tricky stealth sections are frustrating on the hardest difficulty setting. Switch to easy difficulty for your second run through though, and all the guards in the game will be displayed on your minimap—which makes sneaking through the chapters undetected a whole lot easier.

12 PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE FORGOTTEN SANDS

Year **2010** Format **PS3**
Developer **Ubisoft** Trophies **41**

After unlocking the secret Trophy for dropping to Easy difficulty in-game, completing the rest of the story shouldn't present too much of a challenge. Here's a handy tip though: be extra wary of the bosses who must be defeated without taking damage. Oh, and you might want to consider using a guide to find the 21 sarcophagi collectibles because they are deviously hidden.

14 SLY COOPER AND THE THIEVIUS RACCOONUS

Year **2011** Format **PS3/PSN** Developer **Sucker Punch** Trophies **36**

This Platinum is a real steal! You can get your hands on the prize in just one single playthrough of this HD *Sly Cooper* remake, with only a handful of boss fights offering any resistance. Grab the 20 to 40 bottle collectibles in each of the levels, then open the vault for that section to unlock each of the mischievous mammal's special moves. Easy as Sly.

15 MEGAMIND: ULTIMATE SHOWDOWN

Year **2010** Format **PS3**
Developer **THQ** Trophies **26**

Unsurprisingly for a platformer based on a kids' film, the difficulty is far from challenging here. Blast through the 10 levels, defeating each of the four bosses without dying, and you'll clear the whole thing in a few hours.

16 DANTE'S INFERNO

Year **2010** Format **PS3**
Developer **Visceral Games** Trophies **43**

The best approach is to focus on either the holy or unholy path until your level is maxed out, then switch to the other path. Complete the story and grind through 50 waves in Gates of Hell mode, before using Resurrection mode to finish leveling your character.

13 TRIVIAL PURSUIT

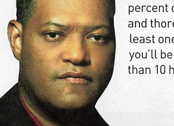
Year **2009** Format **PS3** Developer **Electronic Arts** Trophies **45**

Normally you would need an encyclopaedic level of knowledge to ace board games of Trivial Pursuit, but a convenient glitch in the virtual version means you can hit the PS button at any point to pause the game. A quick answer search on Google is then all you need to breeze your way to victory, you genius.

17 CSI: FATAL CONSPIRACY

Year **2010** Format **PS3** Developer **Telltale Games** Trophies **26**

Even digital Laurence Fishburne can't rescue this mediocre point-and-clicker. Pick up the awards specific to each case while solving the five crimes, scoring 100 percent cunning, skill and thoroughness on at least one case, and you'll be done in less than 10 hours.



You get a Trophy for pausing *Eat Lead*. Nabbing the rest of 'em isn't all that tough either.

18 EAT LEAD: THE RETURN OF MATT HAZARD

Year **2009** Format **PS3** Developer **Vicious Cycle Software** Trophies **51**

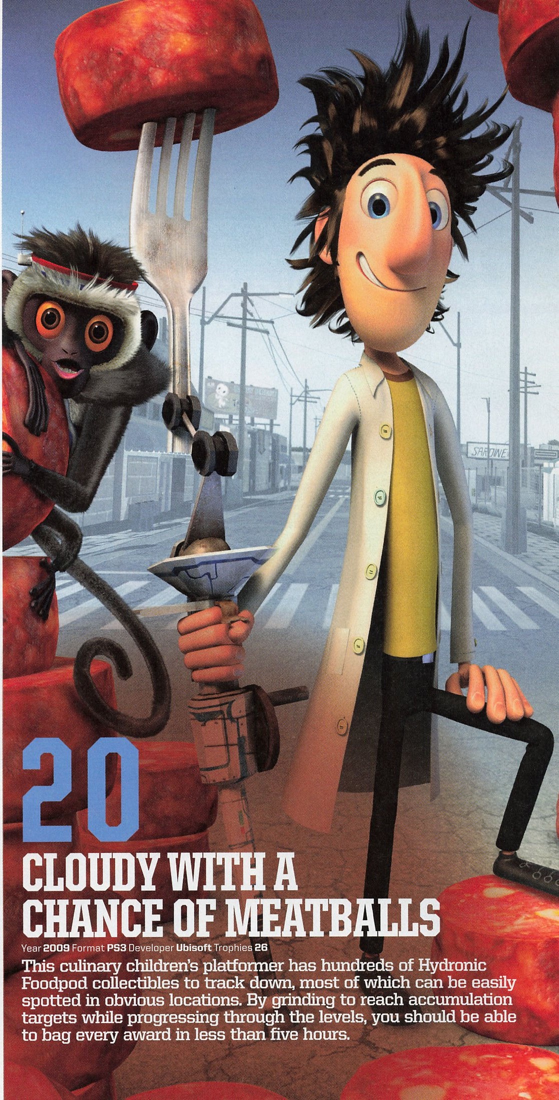
The quickest way to beat this *Duke Nukem* parody is by simply entering a cheat code on the difficulty selection screen to access the hardest "Maximum Hazard" setting straight off the bat. There are a few very frustrating sections to navigate when playing at this level, but once you've finally finished it, you can use level select to go back and just grind your way through the remaining award requirements. Oh, and make sure you remember to watch the credits from beginning to end, and pause the game at least once—yes, there's even a Trophy for doing that!

19 SAW

Year **2009** Format **PS3** Developer **Zombie Studios** Trophies **47**

Although there are many Asylum and Patient Files scattered throughout the game, you only need to locate one of each rather than completing the entire set. There are individual awards unlocked by killing minions with each of the 20-odd weapons available, though any you miss can be picked up later by using chapter select to return to the relevant areas. There are two endings to choose from, so pick one then reload the last checkpoint and select the other for both rewards.

Sometimes, getting a Platinum can feel like this (a headache). Not so in *SAW*



20 CLOUDY WITH A CHANCE OF MEATBALLS

Year **2009** Format **PS3** Developer **Ubisoft** Trophies **26**

This culinary children's platformer has hundreds of Hydronic Foodpod collectibles to track down, most of which can be easily spotted in obvious locations. By grinding to reach accumulation targets while progressing through the levels, you should be able to bag every award in less than five hours.

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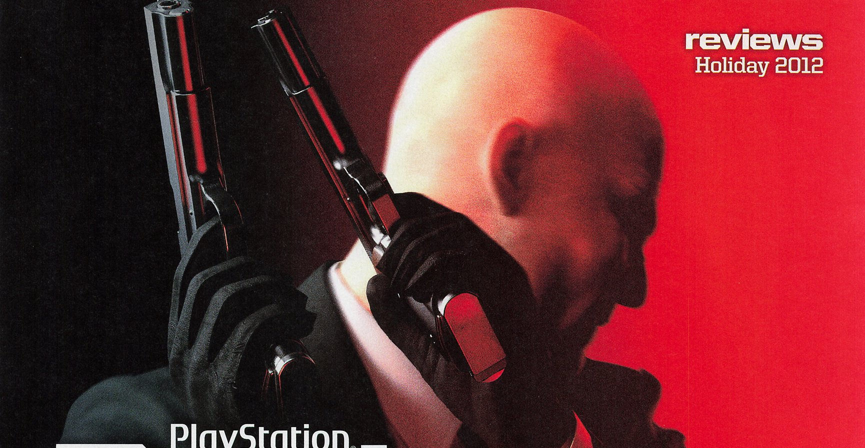


PlayStation®
The Official Magazine

Reviews

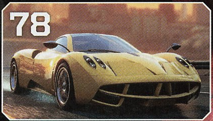
Your essential guide to new releases

Tis the season for brutal, bloody assassinations. What could be more fitting for a holiday issue than reviewing three games solely about killing our fellow man? (It's okay if they're bad guys, right?)

Assassin's Creed III, *Assassin's Creed: Liberation*, and *Hitman: Absolution* are all about creatively ending lives. Do they know it's Christmas/holiday time at all? Maybe this is for the best. With all the family get-togethers and goodwill, we probably need a little break. Time to say bye to Grandma so we can get home and strangle someone with piano wire or slide a Hidden Blade into a spine.

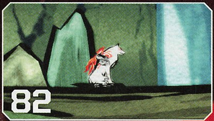
The holidays always make us a little crazy. Videogames are the perfect escape from the dreary normality of home life. Plus, what makes a better gift? We just need to remember to not mention gratuitous violence in our "Thank You" notes.

Murder isn't everyone's answer to holiday stress. Some people prefer dancing or putting sexy supercars through their paces. This issue has something for (almost) every type of gamer. Even those feeling a little nostalgic will have something to pick up and play.



NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED

The scenery is slipping away and all we can see are the dots on the road. We have a serious need for speed.



OKAMI HD

Amaterasu, origin of all that is good and mother to us all, is here to breathe life back into our love for *Okami*. Saving the world has never looked so good.

LITTLEBIGPLANET KARTING

With all the customizability and adorability of a regular *LittleBigPlanet* game, *Karting* is the perfect racer for Sackboy's legion of creative fans.

How we score our reviews...

10	**Awesome**	Instant classic that's nearly PlayStation perfection.
9	**Excellent**	Highly recommended and a great investment.
8	**Great**	Wonderful yet possesses minor flaws.
7	**Good**	Enjoyable but with definite room for improvement.
6	**Acceptable**	A decent offering, but one that only satisfies in places.
5	**Mediocre**	A game that's both fun and frustrating in equal measure.
4	**Flawed**	Too flawed to be anything more than a curiosity.
3	**Poor**	A seriously defective game with no long-term appeal.
2	**Awful**	A disgrace to the bargain bin. Avoid it like the plague.
1	**Raw Sewage**	Apparently, feces *can* be pressed on a disc.

GOLD AWARD
PlayStation The Official Magazine

Our Highest Accolade
The gold award is presented to any game that we feel demonstrates significant innovation, near-flawless gameplay, great graphics, and profound appeal.

▲ Connor as a sea captain doesn't totally make sense, but the naval missions inject the series with some serious excitement.

Assassin's Creed III

A bold new frontier

GOLD AWARD
PlayStation

There really isn't anything quite like *Assassin's Creed*. The breathtaking views, the acrobatic climbing, the sense that we're experiencing real, tangible history—all of these elements combine to create experiences that feel truly special. However, after three consecutive adventures starring Ezio Auditore (which, unlike Ezio himself, did not improve over time), *Assassin's Creed III* needs to deliver something different. Something *fresh*. And while that something isn't quite on par with *Assassin's Creed II*, it nonetheless preserves the franchise's unique appeal while taking it in bold new directions.

Info
Format PS3 **Pub** Ubisoft
Dev Ubisoft Montreal
Price $59.99 **ESRB** Mature
It's like a meticulously planned kill that gets a tad messy in its execution.

The gameplay, for starters, is stronger than ever. While not fundamentally too different from previous games, climbing and fighting now have a much freer, more organic feel to them. Battles still revolve around countering attacks, but new hero Connor Kenway is able to whirl through fights and react to any incoming strikes (now accompanied by *Arkham*-esque warning icons) without the need to ever lock onto an enemy. And if two hapless guards attack us at once, watching Connor simultaneously kill them both with cinematic panache isn't just satisfying, it's flat-out fun to watch. We don't even miss most of the features that have been streamlined out of existence. (Seriously, did anyone really enjoy *Revelations'* bomb crafting?)

The series-defining free running gets a similar upgrade, with slicker animation, somewhat simplified controls, and more intuitive, adaptive climbing. Connor can confidently clamber up surfaces that might not have been scalable in previous games, leaping to high handholds without the need for a hookblade—and unlike Ezio, he almost never randomly leaps off buildings to his death. Connor can even skirt around tree trunks and hurdle over obstacles at high speeds, and as a result, traversal becomes more liberating and enjoyable than ever—which works out perfectly since *ACIII's* world is the series' most expansive and varied setting to date.

Want more?
ACIII has a few extras in store for PS3 owners when it launches. Not only can we connect it to Vita's *ACIII: Liberation* to unlock bonus content, but we'll also get four PS3-exclusive add-on missions at launch, starring one Benedict Arnold and his dastardly plans to betray the Patriots.

Set in colonial New England before, during, and after the Revolutionary War, its modest cabins and soaring statehouses offer a genuinely refreshing departure from the bustling European streets we'd gotten to know a little too well. And while New York and Boston are fun urban backdrops for our ▸▸

While the campaign strives for historical accuracy, the multiplayer...does not.

Oh look! The present day! Better brush up on how the other games ended.

Think *Red Dead Redemption,* but with free running and forests.

Hidden Blade-fueled antics—complete with all the rooftop chases and perfectly placed haystacks we'd expect—the real centerpiece of the experience is the open frontier that connects the two. A massive expanse of cliffs, rivers, trees, and towns that we spent hours just exploring, hunting game, ferreting out hidden secrets, and marveling at the way the changing weather made familiar areas seem almost unrecognizable. Think *Red Dead Redemption*, but with free running and forests instead of plains and deserts.

Birth of a Nation

Naturally, this new setting means a new storyline, and this is where things start to get rocky. Not that the narrative is bad—in fact, by videogame standards, it's damn compelling. As a half-English, half-Native American Assassin whose village stands to be crushed under the heel of Manifest Destiny, Connor is forced to ally himself with American revolutionaries in order to fight the Templars who threaten his people. But while the deep, layered plot features standout moments like the Boston Massacre and the Battle of Lexington, it stops just short of really making them feel important and relatable. And where Ezio's games made legends like Leonardo Da Vinci and Machiavelli feel like familiar friends, *ACIII* reserves that kind of development for its original characters, relegating historical figures like Samuel Adams and George Washington to background roles.

In any other game, these issues wouldn't even *be* issues, but given the game's focus on story and the historical-narrative standards set by *ACII*, they're impossible to ignore. Worse, a few too many missions felt like filler for the sake of shoehorning in historical events, tasking us with tedious fetch quests or tailing missions that didn't play to the game's strengths. Some mission types, it turns out, are *always* dull, no matter their context.

To be fair, the campaign's punctuated by plenty of bigger, more exciting moments, including one that sent us sprinting across a raging battlefield, timing our dashes against the enemy's shots. But a few lackluster story missions aren't the game's only problem; it also has a hard time explaining itself, particularly where side content is concerned. Certain gameplay elements, like conquering Templar forts (which replace *Brotherhood's* Borgia towers) and sending Assassin recruits away on missions, are never really explained or even hinted at until we stumble onto them. We're happy to see these return (and we especially love the way recruits are given more personality this time around), but we also wish the game gave us a better heads-up about them.

The game's riddled with lots of other small-but-significant irritations. For example, while some of the optional secondary quests are fun (like hunting

Five Features That are different yet the same

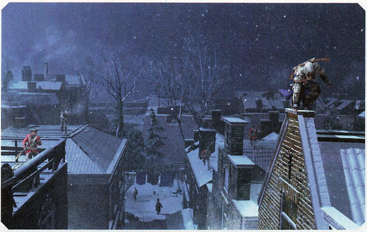
1 Man of the People
While courtesans and mercenaries have been removed, we can now incite riots to distract nearby guards. It's ugly but effective.

2 Buried at Sea
The self-contained, puzzle-based temple missions found in the last few games have been replaced by an oceanic scavenger hunt that functions much the same way.

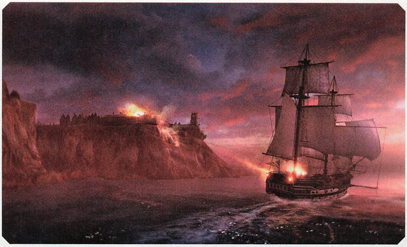
3 Home Sweet Home
Where Ezio had a town, Connor has a huge patch of wilderness that gradually becomes a village with its own storyline.

4 Armed and Ready
Connor's weapons match his era and background, but some are obvious analogues to Ezio's various tools (bow and arrows = crossbow).

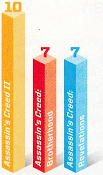
5 Friend of a Friend
The longstanding guilds are gone, replaced by Brawlers, Hunters, and Frontiersmen, who offer their own missions and challenges.



Hiding spots are sparse compared to earlier games. Prepare to run *a lot*.



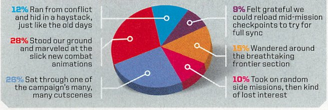
for feathers or investigating increasingly weird stories told by Daniel Boone), others like the assassination and courier "missions" feel like meaningless excuses to visit points on the map. And while even the lamest side missions net us money, there aren't really a lot of things to spend it on. Unlike Ezio, Connor doesn't buy businesses or even armor (which makes sense, given his regenerating health, but which also strips away a layer of character progression), so beyond buying upgrades for Connor's ship and new weapons that don't seem to make much difference in combat, the only real use for cash is a convoluted crafting and selling metagame...which exists largely to earn us more cash.



ScorePole

ACIII easily tops *Brotherhood* and *Revelations*, but can't quite live up to *ACII*'s brilliance.

What we did in... Assassin's Creed III



Liberty or Death

Despite these complaints, our overall experience with *ACIII* proved overwhelmingly positive. The gameplay is stellar, the world is richly detailed and a blast to explore, and the story hits some fantastic emotional highs when it isn't trying to slavishly re-create history. And there are plenty of other things it gets right: the naval missions live up to the hype, with short, gorgeous ship battles that offer an immensely fun change of pace. The Homestead missions, which tell a complete side story about the denizens of a village that Connor founds, are surprisingly compelling. And Desmond—the present-day descendent of both Ezio and Connor, who relives his ancestors' "genetic memories" in a machine called the Animus—makes better use of his limited screen time than ever before.

Perhaps best of all, *Assassin's Creed's* unique multiplayer makes a triumphant comeback. Returning modes like the bloody hide-and-seek simulator Manhunt work better than ever, thanks not only to the game's newly refined mechanics but also to some smart balancing that's eliminated a few of the more unfair perks. The new King of the Hill-esque mode Domination serves as a welcome addition as well, but the real star here is the cooperative Wolf Pack mode, which requires a team of up to four assassins to keep the clock alive by earning points through coordinated killing. The whole thing was so delightfully frustrating that we absolutely could *not* stop playing.

ACIII certainly has its high points: the addictive multiplayer, refined mechanics, involving characters, and unique setting all help to create a rich, compelling experience that surpasses both *Brotherhood* and *Revelations*. And though its sometimes-lethargic campaign holds it back a little, *ACIII* still represents a bold step forward for the franchise—and leaves us curious to see where it'll go next. **MIKEL REPARAZ**

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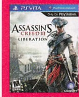
Info



Format PS3
Pub Ubisoft
Dev Ubisoft Sofia
Price $39.99
ESRB Mature
It's like *Assassin's Creed III*, but with a much smaller focus.

Assassin's Creed III Liberation

Less liberating than it could have been

Assassin's Creed spinoffs have a shaky history, but *Liberation* is something different: a handheld game that, for the first time, can offer a full *AC* experience with few compromises. "Can offer" isn't quite the same as "does offer," though, and while *Liberation* gets a lot right, there are a few key areas where it stumbles.

Gameplay-wise, at least, *Liberation* does an impressive job replicating the core mechanics of *Assassin's Creed III*, with fighting, free-running, and climbing that feel nearly identical to their PS3 cousins'. New Orleans-based Assassin Aveline de Grandpré can do much of what Connor does in *ACIII*, and she does it in an open world filled with guards to kill, historically significant things to climb on, and gnarled trees to leap through. And while Aveline can't hide in low brush, ride horses, or carry bodies, she's able to do a few things Connor can't, like use a blowgun to covertly murder enemies while hiding in haystacks or swing across gaps with a whip.

She can also change into three different outfits appropriate for different situations, something that quickly becomes crucial to the game's mission structure, side tasks, and even its economy (strategically located dressing rooms, along with tailor and weapon shops, are among the places we can buy). In her usual Assassin garb, Aveline has a full range of climbing abilities and weaponry, but guards will never leave her alone. Her drab Slave costume, meanwhile, lets her blend in with groups of workers, but limits her arsenal. And her upper-class Lady persona gets the most leeway with authorities—

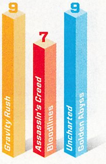
Dominate the World

Liberation's multiplayer takes the form of an asynchronous strategy game that plays out slowly over the course of weeklong cycles, letting us build a stable of Assassin or Templar agents before sending them out to battle other players' characters across a global network of conquerable nodes.

Side-missions—such as helping this voodoo priest make medicine—are plentiful.

and can even charm guards into protecting her—but severely restricts her access to weapons and makes her slow and unable to climb.

Ideally, these outfits should present a range of possibilities for tackling missions in different ways—except that most missions mandate the use of one particular guise, making the costumes feel like imposed restrictions rather than enablers of distinct playstyles. (And because the Assassin is easily the most fun to use, there are few reasons to ever pick the other two when we're given a choice.)



ScorePole

Liberation is an improvement over PSP's *Bloodlines*, but falls short of Vita's best adventures.

Open Your Eyes

Then again, "freedom of choice" isn't exactly *Liberation's* motto. The game's conceit is that it's a piece of entertainment/propaganda created by the control-obsessed, Templar-run Abstergo corporation. While it focuses on Aveline, its "real" goal is to paint the Templars in a positive light—although this is foiled by never-seen hacker Erudito, who breaks into the simulation to show us unedited key events after we've seen the Templars' whitewashed versions.

Otherwise, the story's interesting but unsatisfyingly light by *Assassin's Creed* standards. Zipping from mission to mission, it lets us play through key moments in Aveline's struggle against the Templars but offers little in the way of context, explanation, or a sense that we're witnessing history. Where Connor stumbles through big moments in the Revolution, the 18th century is more of a backdrop for Aveline, whose story focuses more on her family, her efforts to help escaped slaves, and her race to find a First Civilization artifact before the Templars do.

This search takes her from the streets of New Orleans to the Louisiana bayou and even to the ancient Mayan city of Chichen Itza—none of which are as interesting to explore as they sound. The environments are varied, but also feel small and strangely drab, without much of a sense of discovery or importance. And while the dry, Abstergo-penned Database points out a few notable landmarks, it never describes or explains their significance, making them less compelling. The open-world areas contrast sharply, however, with the game's linear "dungeons," which are beautifully realized and fun to delve into. Too bad there aren't more.

Even if exploration and story aren't quite up to the series' standards, *Liberation* does have a copious amount of side stuff to pursue, most of which is pretty enjoyable. Since Aveline controls her father's merchant business, there's a fun (and profitable) international-trade minigame, as well as guise-specific collectibles to ferret out, and assassination missions that open up new businesses for purchase.

While a bit lackluster next to any console *Assassin's Creed* game, *Liberation* is nonetheless a pretty entertaining experience on its own—especially when compared with the rest of Vita's as-yet limited library. It's not the revolution we were hoping for, but it's easily the best portable *Creed* fix yet.

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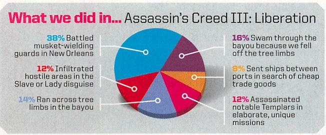
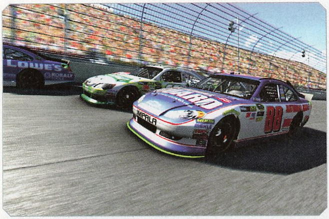
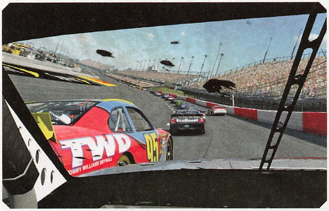
MIKEL REPARAZ

What we did in... Assassin's Creed III: Liberation





Inside Line's weekly Highlights DLC will allow us to relive and, perhaps, change the outcome of dramatic moments from every real-life 2013 race.



NASCAR The Game Inside Line

Breaking through the pack

PS3
NASCAR THE GAME
INSIDE LINE
E
ACTIVISION

Info

Format PS3
Pub Activision **Dev** Eutechnyx
Price $59.99 **ESRB** Everyone
It's like the best PS3 NASCAR game...ever.

Although last year's *NASCAR The Game 2011* was a credible effort, *Inside Line* is the first NASCAR racing game in years that feels like someone cared. Developer Eutechnyx had direct access to NASCAR's real-world telemetry data during the game's development, and it shows in the convincing experience they've produced. All of the real-world vehicles and tracks have been meticulously recreated, and considering that race fields can include up to 43 cars, credit to the devs for keeping the action moving without huge frame-rate hits.

The gameplay itself moves more toward simulation, as last year's arcadey touches have been toned down (or can be turned off). Truly hardcore NASCAR-philes can switch off the wide array of drive assists and tweak a bevy of vehicle tuning options to discover the perfect track-specific car setup. But this is still NASCAR, so be prepared to, at least initially, suffer through numerous Yellow flags and an abundance of left turns. The game allows for some rubbin', but precision and patience are the keys to success.

Oddly, the game's still missing some good ol' boy spirit. Infuse more distinctly NASCAR flavor and this series earns a spot on the podium. ROGER BURCHILL

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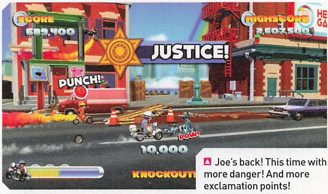
SCORE
HIGHSCORE
JUMP!



Joe's back! This time with more danger! And more exclamation points!

Joe Danger 2 The Movie

Take two—aaaand action!

Joe Danger's triumphant return is a massive sequel with a Hollywood motif and more of everything, though the core gameplay pretty much still focuses on simple controls and exact timing. As stuntman Joe, players will have to complete movie stunt sequences in a variety of vehicles ranging from snowmobiles to jet packs.

Though at times insanely frustrating, the game's visual charm and variety will likely win over most gamers. The fantastic movie sets are 3D, but the gameplay is strictly old-school 2D. The audio cues from the redneck director help out, but lightning-fast reflexes are the only way to win. Ducking, jumping, speed boosting, and performing crazy aerial tricks amidst a near-constant barrage of obstacles is the whole game. There's frequently a time limit as well, upping the challenge level substantially. The game is divided among six different movie themes and even includes deleted scene levels—which are levels deemed too hard to include in the main campaign.

Better still, there's a surprisingly accessible level creation tool. The game is very focused on sharing levels and scores with the world, so there will almost always be new levels to conquer and high scores to beat. *Joe Danger 2* might test our patience, but it's still a great little game well worth the download. JASON D'APRILE

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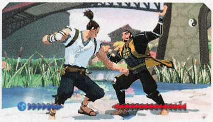
Info

Format PSN
Pub Hello Games
Dev Hello Games
Price $14.99
ESRB Everyone
It's like the original Joe Danger pumped up for Hollywood.

Karateka

Format **PSN** Pub **Karateka LLC** Dev **Liquid Entertainment** Price **$9.99** ESRB **Teen**

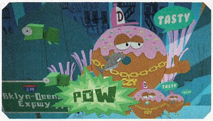


A remake of Jordan Mechner's classic 1984 fighter, *Karateka* is less a fighting game than a rhythm-action game. Unable to simply attack enemies, we wait to *be* attacked, then block our opponents' telegraphed strikes. Success gives us a brief window for counterattacking. It's disappointing at first, but after the initial shock, *Karateka* turns out to be fun and surprisingly addictive. The story can be finished in 30 minutes, but each death switches our viewpoint to a new hero. Only by rescuing the princess as her True Love (the first, weakest fighter) will we get a truly happy ending. **MIKEL REPARAZ**

PlayStation **7**

Derrick the Deathfin

Format **PSN** Pub **Different Tuna** Dev **Different Tuna** Price **$7.99** ESRB **Everyone 10+**

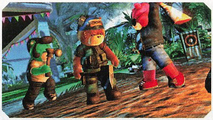


With an adorable paper cutout aesthetic that hits like a blend of *South Park* and *LittleBigPlanet* (plus a keen sense of humor), bite-sized PSN original *Derrick the Deathfin* makes a big presentational splash. But much as this shark tale amuses, it never fully enthralls. Across 32 quick-hit stages, players guide the titular predator through side-scrolling challenges wherein he'll chow down on fish and scuba divers to stay alive, speed through a series of streamlined time trials, and take down the villainous corporation that killed his parents. The simplistic mechanics don't offer that remarkable of a hook, and the game spans just a couple of hours. As a light snack between big holiday releases, however, it's a pleasantly tasty distraction. **ANDREW HAYWARD**

PlayStation **7**

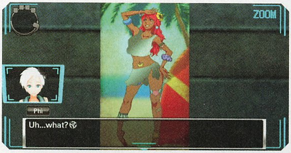
Naughty Bear Panic in Paradise

Format **PSN** Pub **505 Games** Dev **Behaviour Interactive** Price **$14.99** ESRB **Mature**



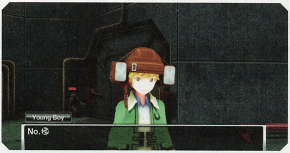
Shoving bears into icy fridges, skewering them on cacti, and decapitating them with a variety of blades is fun at first, but *Panic in Paradise's* murderous shenanigans grow repetitive early-on. Scouring stages for victims to slay and loot to nab does entice us, and unlocking new gear and weapons by plundering coins is satisfying to an extent. But the over-reliance on stealth kills makes anything but a silent takedown a near insta-death. Coupled with unclear objectives, this makes restarting stages frustratingly frequent. *Paradise's* bag of tricks is sadly limited, leaving only a violent juvenile romp we're reluctant to recommend. **NATHAN MEUNIER**

PlayStation **5**



Uh...what?

▲ Get a screen protector for this game – you'll be doing a lot of tapping as you explore the grim environment.



No.

▲ A branching plot leads to 24 different endings, but many of them are...less than satisfying.

Zero Escape
Virtue's Last Reward

A literal prisoner's dilemma

Info

PS VITA
VIRTUE'S·LAST·REWARD

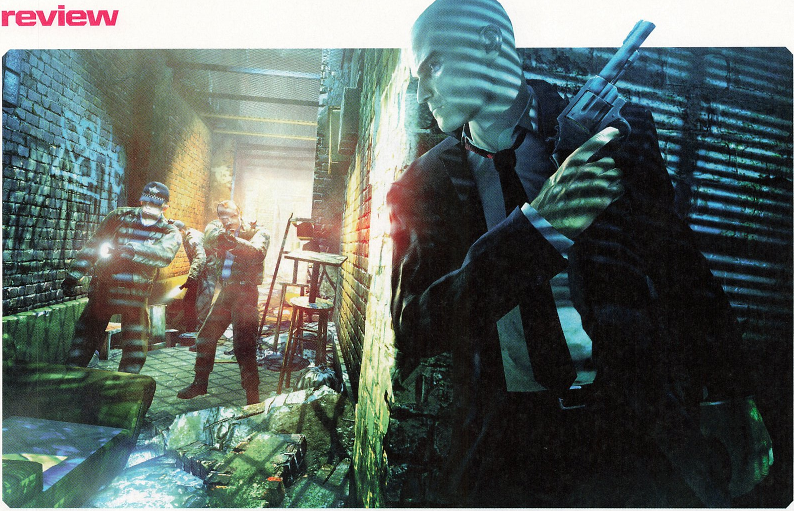
Format PS Vita
Pub XSEED Games
Dev Chunsoft
Price $39.99
ESRB Mature
It's like *SAW 2* with less blood and more anime eyes.

Zero Escape is essentially about some people who are kidnapped and forced to star in an adventure game. The story feels just that contrived, to the point where one wonders if it isn't all a giant metatextual joke. A deus ex machina usually ends a story, but in this case, it provides the beginning: Nine individuals wake up in a warehouse full of locked doors and puzzles that obscure these exits. In between stretches of drama with the inmates, we're meant to do the usual adventure-game thing: look for clues, pick up items, mix them together, and find a way out.

The PS Vita's touchscreen is perfect for point-and-click exploration. Most of the puzzles are quite good as pure brainteasers. The thriller plot even works well enough until you start to wonder whether anything faintly plausible is going to happen. (Mild spoiler alert: it never does.) But beneath the surface, the narrative is just a convoluted framework that hangs a bunch of puzzles together. This may be a well-made rat maze, but a rat maze it is and that's all.

PlayStation **6**

DAVID F. SMITH



Info

Format PS3
Pub Square Enix
Dev IO Interactive
Price $59.99
ESRB Mature
It's like teaching an old hitman deadly new tricks.

Hitman Absolution

There's no rest for the contract killer

It's been two hours and we're still on the same mission. Not because it's impossible, mind, but because our perfectionist side just won't let us move on without putting a bullet in the target's brain Silent Assassin-style. The sleazeball's inside a swanky club, and putting him down without alerting any of the patrons is proving to be...challenging. Having reloaded the mission a dozen times, something finally clicks. We've got this one down to a science.

Using Agent 47's new Instinct Mode—similar to Batman's Detective Mode in *Arkham Asylum*—we see a guard's patrolling path and follow him to a secluded area before choking him out, donning his clothes as a disguise, and dumping his body in a nearby locker. Stepping into the next room, we see a video camera aimed at a one-way mirror. On the other side, our target enters, a stripper following close behind. What transpires next is perhaps the greatest reenactment of a scene from *The Boondock Saints* to ever occur in a videogame: We raise 47's silenced Silverballer pistols and unleash on the unsuspecting scumbag through the glass. Done.

Despite years of service, 47 has been betrayed by the Agency and is thrust into a conspiracy as he seeks his revenge. This bloodbath of an adventure is full of badass hits, multifaceted levels, and approachable

Five Tools No Hitman Should Be Without

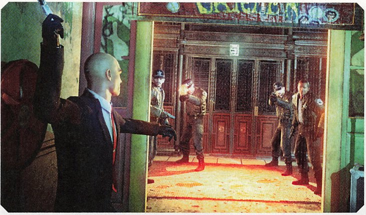
1 **Instinct Mode**
Flip on this super-vision to observe enemy patterns or lower a guard's suspicion if he starts getting a little too curious.

2 **Point Shooting**
In a bind? Point Shooting lets Agent 47 mark targets for quick execution so long as Instinct Mode is active.

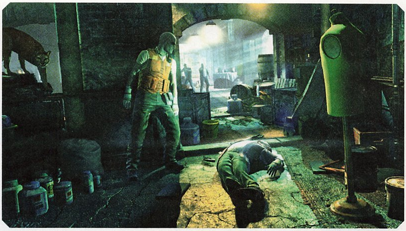
3 **Garrote**
The most basic weapon in a hitman's arsenal, the garrote is ideal for silent takedowns.

4 **Silverballers**
No assassin should head out on a job without a couple of customized pistols (even if they have an awkward name).

5 **A suit**
The best hitmen dress in style—nothing says "strictly business" like a fancy suit! Lucky for us, they just so happen to be standard issue.



▲ Once enemies go into alert mode, they rarely give up the chase.



but challenging stealth play.

While all of these things are done incredibly well, *Absolution* is wrapped around an oddly disjointed structure. It frequently transitions from stellar play to janky cutscenes and back again, often dropping 47 into a new mission without explaining why he's suddenly half way across the country or in a secret underground base. But these things are easy to overlook when every single mission is infused with such a wild degree of choice.

While many of the series' core tenants remain intact—the focus on stealth play and the multitude of gruesome ways to take down marks, in particular—47 enjoys a few new tools as well. The most notable of these is Instinct Mode, which highlights enemies through walls and allows 47 to blend in if anyone starts getting too suspicious. While we relied on this mode quite often, a resource meter limits usage and makes it feel more like a finite tool and less like an overpowered gimmick. Of course, if things go south, mass murder is always a solid backup plan.

The gunplay has certainly been improved since *Blood Money*, but "guns blazing" is rarely the best approach to any situation. Killing non-target enemies detracts from a mission's score, and only by being stealthy and completing challenges can 47 obtain new passive abilities. This constant carrot-on-a-stick (as well as online leaderboards) had us restarting checkpoints more frequently than we'd like to admit. So, too, did wonky A.I. encounters where enemies would randomly see us through walls and put a frustrating kibosh on an otherwise perfect playthrough. While this didn't occur frequently enough to make us rage-quit, it was an annoying occurrence nonetheless.

Contract Killers

Perhaps *Absolution's* most brilliant addition is its asynchronous multiplayer mode, Contracts. Here, players can set up custom hits from within a mission for other players to attempt, dictating where a target is assassinated and how. We dug coming up with crazy, creative ways to eliminate a mark, and successfully doing so meant others could attempt our same hit in a gruesome game of H.O.R.S.E. What's more, besting other players on their own contracts scored us loads of cash, which we happily used to upgrade our equipment and buy new disguises. The sheer number of unlockables and challenges adds tons of replayability to a game that already demands multiple playthroughs. It might've been six years since 47 last got his hands dirty, but he hasn't missed a single stride. **RYAN TALJONICK**

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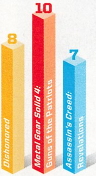
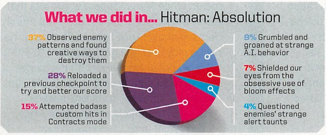


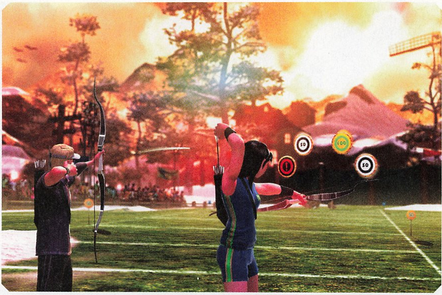
ScorePole
Hitman: Absolution is easily the best in the series and a fantastic stealth game to boot.

What we did in... Hitman: Absolution



Sports Champions 2

Keep your eye on the ball

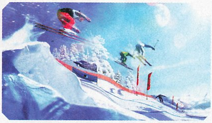


Info

Format PS3
Pub SCEA
Dev Zindagi Games/ Sony San Diego
Price $39.99
ESRB Everyone 10+
It's like a far better showing but still not quite a winning season.

Sports Champions was one of PlayStation Move's better launch titles, providing players with a pick-up-and-play experience that also did a decent job showcasing what Sony's new arm-flailing tech could do. Building on that solid foundation, its more polished sequel gives armchair athletes another great reason to get off the couch.

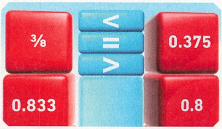
Offering five new sports—skiing, boxing, bowling, tennis, and golf—and a new take on the previous entry's popular archery event, *Sports Champions 2* offers enough fresh content to make it feel like a completely new game rather than a phoned-in follow-up. The developers have removed many of the first games flaws, like repeated fun-halting pre-game calibrations, and added more customization and personality to the local multiplayer mode.



Individual events can be a bit hit or miss (skiing's a blast, boxing not so much), playing solo gets old pretty fast, and online play's still absent, but those looking to spark some spirited casual competition with local friends won't do much better than *Sports Champions 2*.

PlayStation 7

MATT CABRAL



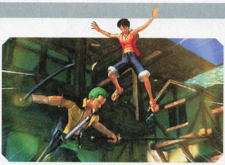
Smart As

Format **Vita** Pub **SCEA** Dev **XDev Studios Europe**
Price **$29.99** ESRB **Everyone**

Everyone loves a good brainteaser every now and then. *Smart As* offers a daily training regimen as well as unlockable Free Play games and a couple online goodies to get our think muscles working. The puzzles are tactile, making use of the Vita's touchscreens as we write out numbers and letters or connect dots. There's even the added bonus of leader-boards so we can show our friends we're smarter than them. While the brainteasers and competition are addicting, there's not enough substance to make *Smart As* worth the price; it'd be better off as a $15 download.

PlayStation 7

ANNE LEWIS



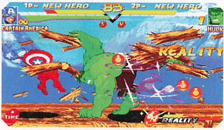
One Piece
Pirate Warriors

Format **PSN** Pub **Namco Bandai** Dev **Tecmo Koei**
Price **$49.99** ESRB **Teen**

From the makers of *Dynasty Warriors* comes yet another crowded, anime-themed beat-'em-up. The characters are goofy enough to make it a generally entertaining mindless brawler, and the game regularly throws in weird exploration and quick-time sequences to break up the otherwise boilerplate *DW*-style action. Unfortunately, these segments are even weaker than the combat. *One Piece* and *Dynasty Warrior* diehards will find plenty to love; anyone else will be bored after about two missions.

PlayStation 6

JASON D'APRILE

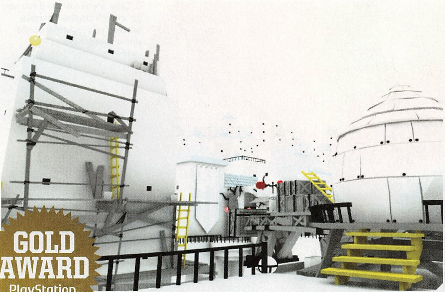


Marvel vs. Capcom Origins

Format **PSN** Pub **Capcom** Dev **Capcom**
Price **$14.99** ESRB **Teen**

With this pixel-perfect port package, fans get the two late '90s fighting games that lai the foundation for the venerable *Versus* series. *Marvel vs. Capcom* offers fast-paced tag-team action with a superbly diverse roster, while *Marvel Super Heroes* lets the comic book all-stars wield powerful Infinity Gems in one-on-one brawls. The welcome online play uses the gold standard GGPO netcode, but at high-levels, these games devolve into infinite combo chaos. Still, this minimal-frills two-pack is definitely entertaining while it lasts. LUCAS SULLIVAN

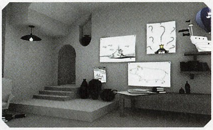
PlayStation 7



GOLD AWARD
PlayStation The Official Magazine

The Unfinished Swan

Simply enchanting



Every facet of this adventure possesses a beautiful, artistic touch.

Info
Format PS3
Pub SCEA **Dev** Giant Sparrow
Price $14.99 **ESRB** Everyone 10+
It's like a children's storybook made for adults.

Staring into the empty void of a blank canvas is an odd way to start an adventure, but from the moment we threw our first blot of ink and watched as it splattered messily to reveal an entirely invisible world, we knew *The Unfinished Swan* had something magical in store for us. An orphaned boy, an incomplete painting, and an ancient brush open the gateway to a fantastic realm full of mystery and intrigue in this fascinating first-person storybook adventure.

Initially, the game focuses solely on exploration and discovery—a straightforward task of moving, looking, and jumping that's made far more interesting by the fact that the entire world is blank until we fling enough ink at it to define its objects and boundaries. This clever visual trick proved captivating enough to sustain our curiosity through the early stretches of the game, but what makes *Swan* so brilliant is the way it constantly shifts to keep us guessing what comes next. Funky twists and cool surprises are paced perfectly so new elements are thrown into the mix before the previous ones get stale.

As the story picks up, more of the world and its secrets are revealed, and the distinct chapters each feature unique visual elements and puzzles that beautifully tie into the unfolding tale. While hurling blobs of ink and water around is the primary means of interacting with objects, the effect this mechanic has on the realm also changes in curious ways over time. Whether we're directing a glowing orb through a dark, spider-filled forest or growing vines up the sides of towering castle walls to progress onward, the simple act of throwing wet blobs at the landscape never grows old.

Few stretches of this brief but thoroughly enjoyable adventure ever pose any real challenge, but its simple elegance and heady atmosphere are spellbinding on their own. The journey and the heartfelt story that ties everything together are masterfully crafted. Absolutely enchanting from start-to-finish, *Swan* is a real treat and a prime example of why bigger isn't always better. There just isn't anything else quite like it out there, and we're stoked to see more. **NATHAN MEUNIER**

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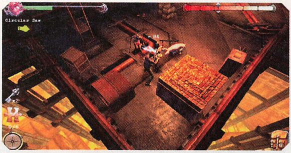
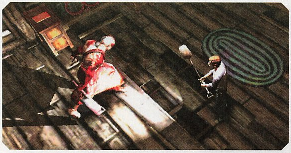


The first nightmare is pretty easy. Afterward, prepare to get sucker-punched.



Silent Hill Book of Memories

"Dungeon crawler" sounds kind of creepy...right?

Info

PS VITA
SILENT HILL
Book Of Memories
KONAMI

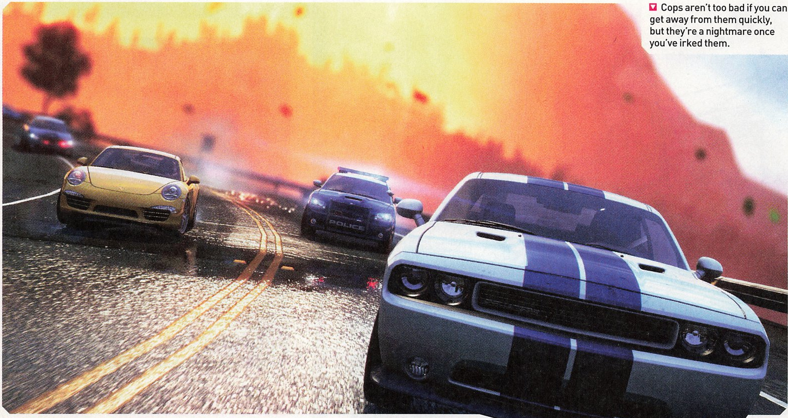
Format PS Vita
Pub Konami
Dev WayForward Technologies
Price $39.99
ESRB Mature
It's like *NetHack* with Pyramid Head in it.

Coming to grips with *Silent Hill: Book of Memories* is tricky. It's not bad for what it is, but it isn't really a *Silent Hill* game. If you like a challenging dungeon crawl, you might like this. If you want an adventure into psychological horror, maybe not.

Book of Memories, as we suggested, is a hack-'n'-slash RPG where the "dungeons" are the nightmares of someone who's learning why not to play with an old monkey's paw. They're populated with plenty of familiar monsters and weapons, as well as online partners to help out with the hacking. Compared to a loot-fountain game like *Diablo*, it's a tense, deliberate experience. The challenge comes from scrounging up items, rationing resources, and mastering a complex magic system that gradually reveals new abilities.

Memories gets a lot out of *Silent Hill's* visual style—that uniquely grim color palette, where everything seems to be covered in layers of decay—but even so, it never visits the kind of truly disturbing places the series has reached before. As dungeon crawls go, it's unique. Just don't expect a *Silent Hill 2* level of scary. **DAVID F. SMITH**

PlayStation The Official Magazine **7**



Cops aren't too bad if you can get away from them quickly, but they're a nightmare once you've irked them.

Need for Speed Most Wanted

A Burnout Paradise HD Remix, now with more cops!

On paper, *Most Wanted* is the perfect racing game: a white-knuckle blend of *Burnout Paradise's* open-world exploration and *Need for Speed's* slick, super-fast polish. In reality, the game has a few issues holding it back from perfection, most of which stem from its bold design decisions.

Like *Paradise*, *Most Wanted* chucks linear progression out the window and opts instead for an open world full of jumps, city driving, winding mountain roads, and brutal police chases. With the exception of the 10 special "Most Wanted" cars, players can drive virtually any vehicle anywhere as soon as they start the game, and we cannot overstate what an amazing sense of speed *Most Wanted* communicates. Cars get appreciably faster as the game goes on, and once we'd achieved a fully upgraded supercar, racing reached a blistering pace, resulting in a huge number of exhilarating close calls.

While speed is important, survivability plays a huge role as well. Clean racing was generally not enough; actively attacking our opponents proved essential, particularly during police chases. Fortunately, vehicle upgrades are split evenly between performance and survivability boosts, and they make a huge difference once they're equipped.

Info

Format PS3
Pub Electronic Arts
Dev Criterion Games
Price $59.99
ESRB Everyone 10+
It's like a great racing game that hinges on your love of total freedom.

Five Tactics For surviving Fairhaven City

1 **Full of Air**
Every race against the Most Wanted cars involves the cops, so be sure to equip your re-inflating tires before challenging them.

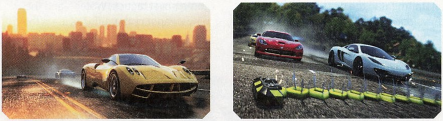
2 **Juking the Cops**
Once the cops have lost sight of you, click L3 while stopped to turn your engine off and watch the Heat Meter plummet.

3 **Car of Duty**
In multiplayer, *Call of Duty*-style Deathstreaks grant cars a temporary boost after they've wrecked a couple times.

4 **Light as a Feather**
Lightweight cars like the Ariel Atom and Caterham 7 look cool, but they get bullied by heavier cars.

5 **Thick Like a Brick**
The Benz SLS AMG and BMW M3 Coupe offer a great blend of survivability and speed. Solid choices.

The variety of available rides, both old and new, is one of *Most Wanted's* best attributes.



Once an upgrade is unlocked, an even better Pro version can be earned.

They generally offer a trade-off, sacrificing speed for survivability or vice versa, and must be unlocked per vehicle.

Outside of besting our friends and defeating the Most Wanted racers, the only concrete goal in the game becomes endlessly upgrading every car, like it or not. Aside from that, the much loved Autolog system returns to add a few ambient goals by keeping track of nearly everything we do and comparing it to our friends. Really, *Most Wanted* is all about pushing competition among friends. Speed cameras and billboards dot the landscape, begging us to set speed and long distance jump records, respectively. If we set a record long jump through a billboard, our face will appear on it in our friends' games.

Bumper to Bumper

The game's multiplayer is one of its biggest draws, combining head-to-head racing, co-op, and other contests into a sequential series of events. While there's the typical sprint and circuit races, special challenges do a great job rewarding both teamwork and raw aggression. One of the multiplayer's best features is the ability to take someone down during an event, thereby rendering them incapable of scoring. This forces them to earn SpeedPoints by taking out other players since the overall winner is determined by SpeedPoints, not first place finishes. Features like this do a great job of fostering intense rivalries.

Despite everything it does well, *Most Wanted* still has problems. The game features just two camera angles: a third-person view and a ground-level camera that's too low. Police pursuits might be the biggest issue, though, as escaping from them with low-level vehicles is extremely challenging. Upgraded vehicles have a much easier time with evading the cops, but when we're just trying to get from point A to point B, pursuits can be a pain.

Ultimately, your enjoyment of *Most Wanted* hinges heavily on what you're looking for. Goal-oriented gamers needing a concrete beginning and end will be let down, but if you're easily engrossed with multiplayer and exploration, *Most Wanted* is certainly a blast. **MICHAEL GRIMM**

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PLAYER1
K.O.
64
WIN
PLAYER2
Blanka
Alisa

Costumes and characters can all be swapped between the PS3 and Vita versions of the game.

PLAYER1
K.O.
PLAYER2
Sakura
Lars

The Gems system didn't catch on, but it offers some interesting options.

Street Fighter X Tekken

Too little, too late

Info

Format Vita
Pub Capcom
Dev Capcom
Price $39.99
ESRB Teen
It's like a warts-and-all port with some extra bits glued on.

As a direct port of the console version, *Street Fighter X Tekken* is still a slick, if problematic, fighting game that offers a lot of options for casual players and enough of a challenge to keep hardcore players interested, even if its competitive life is pretty much over. The game includes crossplay between the PS3 and Vita, as well as all 55 characters, 38 costumes, and a new survival mode. It's a nice bonus for a product that could otherwise be accused of trying to squeeze blood from a stone.

The obligatory touchscreen controls make inputs like simultaneously pressing three punches or kicks easier, but the back touchpanel buttons are far too easy to unintentionally graze while playing (thankfully, they can be deactivated). The touch controls also serve as the main input for the borderline unplayable Casual mode, which moves our character around the screen for us and reduces our inputs to random attacks.

Given the smaller screen and weaker controls, there's almost no reason to play this if you've already experienced *SFXT*. **MICHAEL GRIMM**

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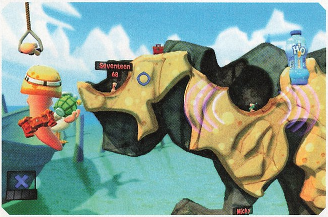
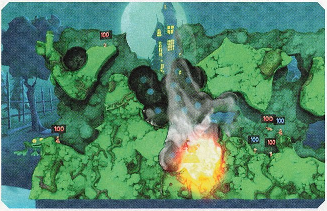
Worms Revolution

Déjà vu all over again



▲ There's still something brilliant about the way chaos unfolds with a well-placed shot (even if we've seen it all before).



Info
Format PSN **Pub** Warner Bros. Int. **Dev** Team17 Software **Price** $14.99 (download) **ESRB** Everyone 10+ **It's like** the same can of *Worms* we opened years ago.

Saying the *Worms* franchise has grown a little predictable over the years is a major understatement. The popular cartoonish bombardment series starring squirmy annelids with snappy one-liners has consistently stuck to the same core formula, offering only minor tweaks from one installment to the next. Sadly, *Worms: Revolution* doesn't buck this trend.

Just like previous installments, both the solo campaign and multiplayer maps feature opposing armies of worms taking turns lobbing missiles, grenades, and tons of other deadly gadgets at one another, decimating the landscape and causing humorous chaos in the process. Battles still play out across a fully destructible 2D landscape, but some slick new 3D polish and animated backgrounds pretty up the presentation nicely.

Classes are among the more notable additions. Now worms are broken down into soldiers, heavies, scientists, and scouts. Each has its own strengths and weaknesses on the battlefield, though their impact on gameplay isn't as substantial as we'd hope. New physics objects like water, poisonous mushrooms, and telekinesis also open up some novel tactics. Water—and the new weaponry that utilizes it—is the most fun to fiddle with since drowning foes or sweeping them off the map is particularly satisfying.

Despite bringing a few fresh nuances to the table, *Revolution* doesn't exactly live up to its name. **NATHAN MEUNIER**

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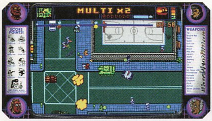

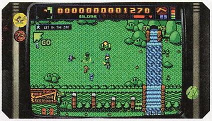

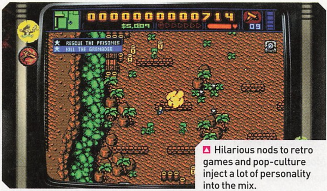

▲ Hilarious nods to retro games and pop-culture inject a lot of personality into the mix.

Retro City Rampage

A crazy homage to the classics

A near endless parade of old-school nostalgia, pop culture satire, and criminal mayhem, *Retro City Rampage* is what a goofier *Grand Theft Auto* might have been like were it made for 8-bit consoles. The mission-based story mode is jam packed with an impressive number of silly references to classic games and 80s TV culture, and every nook and cranny of the pixelated city holds secrets and visual gags that made us chuckle with each surprise we uncovered.

Causing havoc around the city is a lot of fun when we set out on our own to explore, steal cars, run down citizens, and tussle with the cops, but the campaign itself is hit or miss. Since many of the missions attempt to emulate sequences from specific games like *Super Mario Bros.* and *Paperboy* right down to their most unforgiving elements, not every humorous vignette is as enjoyable gameplay-wise.

Random difficulty spikes and a lack of mission checkpoints make repeating some stretches a little frustrating as well, and nostalgia can only cover the tedium and frustration for so long.

A strong pixel-art presentation, great chip-music soundtrack, and tons of wacky creative flair tops off *Retro City Rampage's* formidable charm. While it's not quite a perfect package, there's a lot to love about the way the open-world craziness unfolds despite the game's oddly self-aware inclusion of some of gaming's more annoying, antiquated mechanics. **NATHAN MEUNIER**

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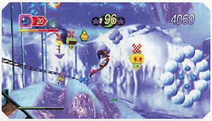
Info
Format PSN/Vita **Pub** D3Publisher **Dev** VBlank Ent. **Price** $14.99 (download) **ESRB** Teen **It's like** a sillier *GTA* filtered through an 8-bit lens.

NiGHTS Into Dreams HD

Format **PSN** Pub **Sega** Dev **Sega** Price **$9.99** ESRB **Everyone**



The psychedelic dreamscapes of the original Sega Saturn cult classic return along with a decadent slice of nostalgia in *NiGHTS Into Dreams HD*. Kaleidoscopic, candy-colored forests and crystalline gates punctuated our frenetic race through the land of Nightopia. We found it as gleefully obtuse as ever, and its willful refusal to reveal its secrets made us all the more anxious to soar through its cheery blue skies. For a trippy rush of never-give-up candor and liberating loop-de-loops, take a trip back to the Sega Saturn and switch off your brain for a while.

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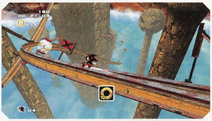
BRITTANY VINCENT

Sonic Adventure 2 HD

Format **PS3** Pub **Sega** Dev **Sega** Price **$9.99** ESRB **Everyone 10+**



Sonic Adventure 2 HD is the same game we fell in love with in 2001, but it certainly hasn't aged gracefully. The cheap deaths and grating camera angles that plagued the original remain largely untouched, and it's difficult to discern any meaningful aesthetic improvements. Dual campaigns provide some diversity and a reason to return once the main levels have been completed, but this barebones port feels hollow. We found ourselves gravitating to the Chao Garden pet sim just to get a break from vexing boss encounters, frustrating level design, and saccharine cheeriness of it all. The only real reason to purchase this port is if the prospect of scouting out a Dreamcast and a copy of the game seems a bit pricey.

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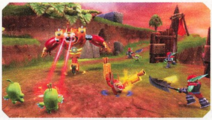
BRITTANY VINCENT

Skylanders Giants

Format **PS3** Pub **Activision** Dev **Toys for Bob** Price **$59.99, $74.99 (starter kit)** ESRB **Everyone 10+**



This sequel to last year's toy/game megahit *Skylanders: Spyro's Adventure* seems certain to continue the collectible figure-buying frenzy of its young but loyal fanbase. The 16 new characters (eight of which are the over-sized Giants) are the most notable addition, but level caps for the previous game's figures have been raised from 10 to 15 so they're not obsolete. The simple but fun RPG-lite adventure gameplay is still great for parent/child co-play, but we had no problem blowing through the campaign in a single weekend. A minor but important change is that the Power Portal is now wired, which should eliminate episodes of lost wireless USB fobs.

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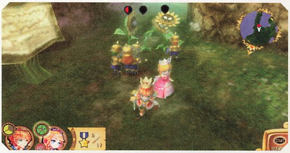
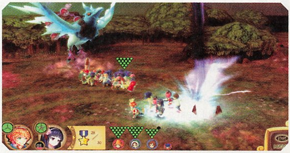
ROGER BURCHILL



Build up your kingdom from a run-down shack to a sprawling medieval metropolis.



Upgraded troops include miners, archers, farmers, and lumberjacks in furry coonskin hats.

New Little King's Story

It's good to be king

Info

Format PS Vita
Pub Konami
Dev Cing
Price $39.99 (download)
ESRB Everyone
It's like *Pikmin* meets *ActRaiser*.

If its framerate didn't have so much trouble keeping up from certain camera angles, *New Little King's Story* would be just about perfect in its own way. Yes, it looks like *Fisher-Price Little People: The Game*, but under the cuteness overload, it's hiding some serious depth.

The king of the Alpoko Kingdom feels a lot like *Pikmin*'s Olimar at first, commanding a crew of soldiers in a simple strategy-action scheme to clear bad guys off his turf. Soon enough, he also takes on the jobs of a real-time strategy general and a *SimCity* mayor: building new structures, researching new unit types, and micro-managing the lives of his citizens.

Gang-stomping monsters is fun on a basic level, but the layers of gameplay that break up the action are what give *Little King's Story* legs. Gather loot. Spend cash. Buy buildings. Spawn soldiers. Craft gear. Form a crew to bring in even more territory and loot, then start all over again. It's an addictive cycle, and every step has its own interesting challenges. RPG and strategy fans shouldn't let this little sleeper pass by.

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DAVID F. SMITH

Okami HD

The brush is mightier

Info
Format PSN **Pub** Capcom
Dev HexaDrive **Price** $19.99
ESRB Teen **It's like** our dreams have been hand-painted by angels who love dogs.

Despite already being one of the most beautiful games we've ever played, *Okami's* cel-shaded style and bright colors take to this HD upgrade spectacularly. The wolf goddess Amaterasu is awakened to defeat the demon Orochi, who has placed a curse on the land of Nippon after 100 years of peace. She must first master the Celestial Brush techniques (like elemental control) by "drawing" their shapes across the screen. Along the way, she cleanses the evil plaguing the world by rejuvenating trees called Guardian Saplings—a process so beautiful it makes us shiver.

Though the game itself remains as moving as ever, the update arguably could've been better. The inability to "fast forward" the game's many lengthy text conversations could've been an easy fix, but it was overlooked. And those hoping *Okami* will be a good addition to their Move collection might be disappointed, as there's no camera control, and unless the Move is perfectly calibrated, drawing shapes can be clumsy. Despite these flaws, however, *Okami* is still one of our favorite games and more than worth a meager 20 bucks.

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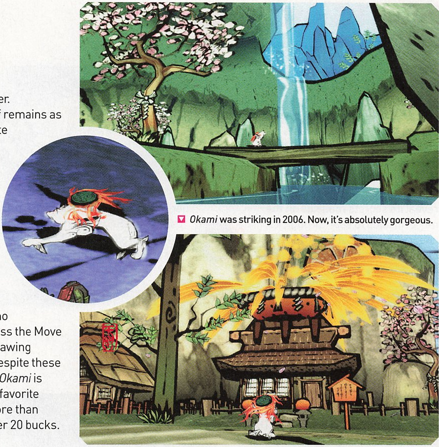
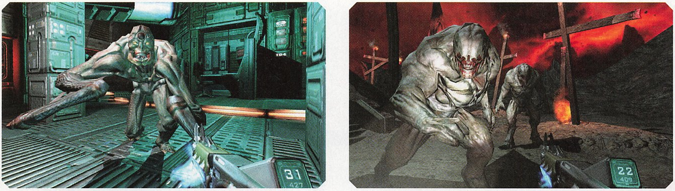
ANNE LEWIS



▼ *Okami* was striking in 2006. Now, it's absolutely gorgeous.



◄ Screens like this would have been impossible in the original *Doom 3*, which forbade use of a gun and a flashlight at the same time. *BFG Edition* fixes that.

Info

Format PS3
Pub Bethesda Softworks
Dev id Software
Price $39.99
ESRB Mature
It's like what *Dead Space* is slowly becoming.

Doom 3 BFG Edition

A shot in the dark

Let's start with some hard truths: *Doom 3* hasn't aged particularly well. Both its mechanics and its graphics (despite the decent HD update) still feel dated, relying on "monster in the closet" scares and random difficulty spikes. It's a living example of how far first-person shooters have come since 2004.

That said, it's still charming in a campy sci-fi kind of way. From our initial arrival on Mars to the (often overly) dark corridors we're constantly compelled to trudge down, the game does a remarkable job of creating a distinct, pulpy atmosphere, and whether you love it ironically or genuinely, the effect is still novel. And while the antiquated hunt-for-health system can grow tiresome, blasting the guts out of space monsters is the best kind of mindless fun.

Throw in the original two *Doom* games, some online multiplayer, and a handful of extra content that fans of the original *Doom 3* may have missed, and suddenly the $40 price tag seems pretty reasonable...as long as you don't expect too much. **SCOTT BUTTERWORTH**

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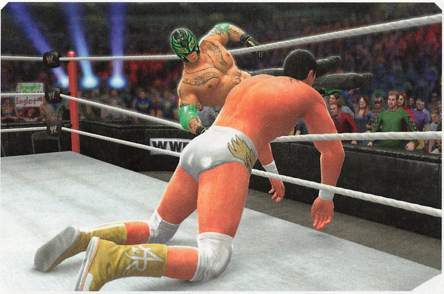
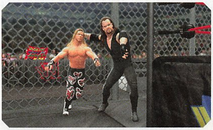


WWE '13

An attitude problem

The "Attitude Era" was a high point in WWE's history, representing a period when Vince McMahon's wrestling league truly embraced the "entertainment" side of the sport to create more interesting storylines spotlighting its most popular talent. THQ's *WWE '13* is all about this time in wrestling's history. The largest change from last year's installation comes in the new campaign, which replaces the "Road to Wrestlemania" with an Attitude-fueled trip through memory lane. For fans who grew up watching the likes of Stone Cold Steve Austin, The Rock, and Mankind battling on Monday nights, this is a remarkably nostalgic adventure, hitting all the right chords and adapting some of the best moments, from the first Hell in a Cell match to the "Montreal Screwjob." Cutscenes tie the moments together, making this as educational as it is entertaining.

While it's admirable that THQ was able to recreate these matches in-game, it often tries too hard to make us perfectly recreate the moment. We spent much of our time trying to mimic the real events, sacrificing enjoyment in favor of theatrics and technical details that don't really matter. Trying to recreate events *perfectly* is always the least interesting part of "replay history" matches in any sports game, and THQ built an entire campaign around it.



"OMG! Moments" are context-sensitive events designed to make us yell "OMG!"

Info

Format PS3 **Pub** THQ **Dev** Yuke's **Price** $59.99 **ESRB** Teen **It's like** watching Mankind get thrown through a table for the first time.

Naturally, it sometimes falls flat—unsurprising, considering how many Attitude Era events involved betrayals and people "mistakenly" hitting the wrong person with a chair. Sometimes these are segmented as secondary objectives, but we often found ourselves bored in an attempt to make the match "perfect."

It's also a shame that the gameplay hasn't evolved much since last year's title, despite being in need of some overhauls and bug fixes. *WWE '12's* problems with clipping and hit detection seem to have actually gotten worse, making an already-messy game more problematic. Besides that, it sports all the changes we expect from a new *WWE* game, from new fighters and modifications to the game's other, less 'tude-infested modes. But there's no denying that the highlight is the Attitude Era mode, and though it has its flaws, it's a dream come true for children of the '90s.

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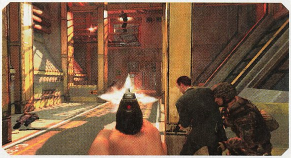
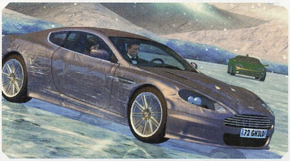
HOLLANDER COOPER



Even the bad guys can't muster much enthusiasm for this by-the-numbers shooter.



This scene was better in the awful movie it was lifted from.

007 Legends

Not shaken nor stirred, just bland

Info

PS3
007 LEGENDS
ACTIVISION

Format PS3
Pub Activision
Dev Eurocom
Price $59.99
ESRB Teen
It's like a generic spy shooter wearing James Bond's tux.

After being shot and falling off a bridge, James Bond's life flashes before his eyes. Or at least the portions covered in the movies *Goldfinger*, *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, *Moonraker*, *License to Kill*, and *Die Another Day*. But Ian Fleming's superspy must have a shoddy memory, because these adventures were a lot more exciting in the movies than they are in this game.

While *Legends* has all the gadgets, driving, fisticuffs, and sneaking fans would expect from a Bond game, it's mostly a rote first-person shooter. Because the levels are usually straightforward, the boss battles always redundant, the optional auto-targeting overly enthusiastic, and bad guys terrible at ducking and flanking, most of the firefights are staid affairs, devoid of any sense of urgency or danger. There's also, oddly, a distinct lack of cinematic flair. Or any kind of visual panache, for that matter. Even the controls are neither great nor terrible, but just okay. None of this makes for a bad Bond game, or even a bad first-person shooter—just one that isn't, well, memorable.

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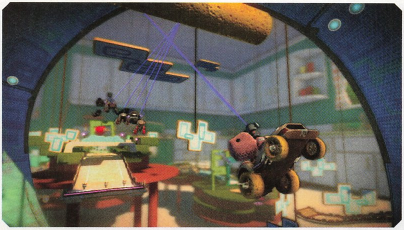
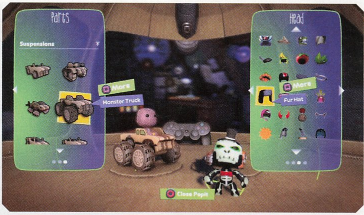
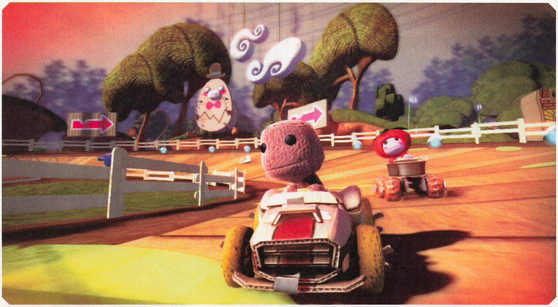
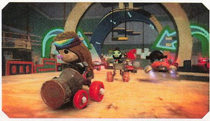
PAUL SEMEL





We hope the *LittleBigPlanet* community's creativity transfers to *Karting* as well.





LittleBigPlanet Karting

Sackboy discovers his need for speed

Info

Format PS3
Pub SCEA
Dev United Front Games
Price $59.99
ESRB Everyone
It's like Sackboy hijacked *ModNation Racers.*

Whoever came up with the idea of combining struggling kart-racing series *ModNation Racers* with successful platforming franchise *LittleBigPlanet* deserves a raise. Sure, *LittleBigPlanet Karting* isn't officially a *ModNation*/*LBP* mash-up, but with the former's developer, United Front Games, marrying its racing expertise to Media Molecule's charming characters and environments, it's no secret what's happening beneath the burlap. Regardless of how it was spawned, *Karting* is a solid entry Sackboy fans and lead-foot racers will want to buckle up for.

Even before putting the pedal to the metal, *Karting* is very much an authentic *LBP* experience. From Stephen Fry's enchanting narration and players' customizable Pods to the Popit menu mechanics and the personality-packed presentation, Sackboy's lap around the track is absolutely drenched in the series' signature style.

While *LBP's* faithful following will surely appreciate the attention to detail, karting enthusiasts will be more concerned with passing competitors than ogling cute characters. Thankfully, *Karting's* gameplay comes close to matching the quality of its style. The core concept should feel familiar to anyone who's ever tooled around the Mushroom Kingdom. Simple steering, accelerating, braking, and drifting controls are complemented by game-changers such as turbo boosts and powerups littered throughout the tracks. Of course, in *LBP's* inventive world, the latter includes items such as pilotable boxing gloves that KO the competition while hurtling forward.

To that point, style generally trumps substance when it comes to *Karting's* support for more strategic gameplay. When compared to similar titles, there's noticeably less nuance to the drifting, controls feel especially forgiving, and the sense of speed is a tad lacking—issues that will barely register for most, but veteran speedsters might crave a bit more depth behind the wheel. When it comes to content, however, depth isn't a problem. *Karting* is bursting with races, battle arenas, minigames, challenges, and collectables that only could have spilled from the creative brains of Sackboy's handlers. Whether solo or on the couch with friends or online, there's a dizzying amount of fun to dig into.

And that's just what's on the disc. Like any *LBP* entry, *Karting* will really find its legs once the community's had a chance to dig in and start making some fresh content of its own.

Sackboy's latest won't dethrone any kart-racing kings, but its adorable style, plentiful content, and accessible creation tools make it a worthy competitor to the cup.

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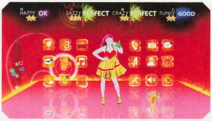
MATT CABRAL

Just Dance 4

Format **PS3** Pub **Ubisoft** Dev **Ubisoft** Price **$39.99** ESRB **Everyone**



If you've played one *Just Dance*, you've played them all, and this installment offers no real surprises. The series consistently serves up the same combination of technicolor visuals, basic choreography, and very mainstream music; legitimate dance skill has always been entirely optional. In this case, accurate movement of the one hand holding the Move can earn just as as many, if not more, points than the friend next to us actually trying to dance. Accessibility is the game's strongest sell, however, and everyone from drunk uncles to tween cousins will find a song they'll enjoy. CHERYLL DEL ROSARIO

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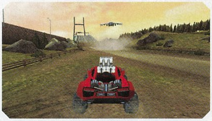
Spy Hunter

Format **PS Vita** Pub **Warner Bros. Interactive Ent.** Dev **TT Fusion** Price **$39.99** ESRB **Everyone 10+**



Spy Hunter speaks to something basic in the heart of anyone who's ever driven a car in traffic. Admit it—deep down, you really wish you could machinegun all those other people off the road. This remake has 3D graphics and some new bells and whistles, but it's true to the spirit of the 1983 arcade game: Drive fast. Blow up stuff with machine guns. Fly off ramps and turn into a boat. These are all inherently fun things to do, and TT Fusion dials them in well. That said, 40 bucks is pretty steep for what's basically an arcade action game. To a certain breed of driver, though, the stress relief might be worth it. DAVID F. SMITH

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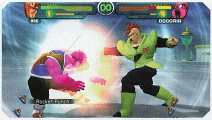
Dragon Ball Z
Budokai HD Collection

Format **PS3** Pub **Namco Bandai** Dev **Dimps** Price **$39.99** ESRB **Teen**



To many *Dragon Ball* fans, the beloved anime series' best games were spawned by the *Budokai* series. The games featured deep rosters, huge attacks, and a wealth of side modes that grew with every release. Those fans will be happy to see the series return in HD, even if the gussied-up graphics aren't accompanied by online multiplayer. The first *Budokai* is a nice reminder of how the franchise began, but it's *Budokai 3* that's held up the best, so much so that we don't care if *Budokai 2* isn't in the package. The frenetic action and controls really capture the essence of the anime, and even if *DBZ* isn't as spry as it used to be, this is a nice reminder of its heyday. HENRY GILBERT

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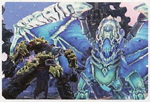
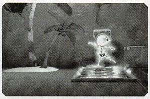
DLC Roundup



Darksiders II
Argul's Tomb

Price **$6.99** ESRB **Mature**

Nestled into the icy mountains capped by snowy peaks and howling winds, Argul's Tomb holds a treasure trove of arcane loot ripe for pillaging, but these goodies aren't easily won. A mix of on-rails shooter action, violent encounters with burly beasts, and dungeon puzzle-play await.

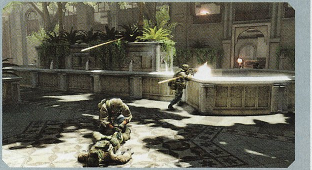


Escape Plan
Director's Cut DLC

Price **$4.99** ESRB **Teen**

We're delighted to send Lil and Laarg through another gauntlet of gloomy grayscale Vita puzzle doom to experience the Slap-a-ma-tron 9001. A quartet of cute costumes make a nice perk for our troubles, but it's the 21 new grueling, danger-filled stages that are the real attraction.

Download of the Month



Ghost Recon: Future Soldier
Khyber Strike

Price **$9.99** ESRB **Mature**

Placing a square emphasis on beefing up *Future Soldier's* competitive multiplayer, Khyber Strike adds a handful of beautiful new maps for high-tech deathmatches in addition to a fresh challenge for Guerrilla mode. More importantly, the new Takedown mode throws a point-capturing twist on traditional deathmatches, and the DLC raises the level cap by 10.

Resident Evil Retribution

It's like a bad live-action videogame

Info

Price $35.99
Creator Paul W.S. Anderson
Starring Milla Jovovich, Sienna Guillory, Michelle Rodriguez
Rated R **Extras** Director and actor commentary; making-of featurettes.

Paul W.S. Anderson just keeps churning out these awful movies, but this time, at least he had enough sense to make the complete lack of logic work for him. Much of *Resident Evil: Retribution* takes place in a secret facility with giant testing labs based on major cities and suburbs. This allows the action to go all over the place without any interest in logic, but still almost makes some meager sense.

Anderson's obsession with making his wife, Milla Jovovich, a superhero is in full throttle here as well. Like all these movies, there's a bizarre need to make Milla seem like a superstar, so there are ridiculous sequences of her as a suburban housewife, fragile patient, and other clichés that the series has gone back to over and over. It's all impossible to take seriously, although the filmmakers certainly seem to.

The action here is shiny and good-looking, as Milla flips, kicks, and shoots her way through throngs of undead monsters. The acting is almost as universally terrible as the script, but at least it's a slight improvement over the last movie (*Resident Evil: Afterlife*). The movie throws in some characters who happen to have the same name as those from the games as well, but the show is entirely Milla-focused, making everyone else cannon fodder.

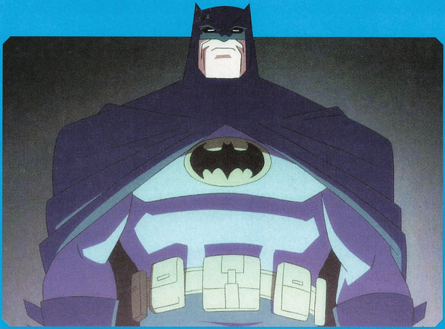
Retribution's enclosed setting allows the director endless opportunities to attempt to emulate the styles of far more talented filmmakers, to the point where the action occasionally works on a basic level. There's plenty of fast-paced gunplay and martial arts, and tons of stylized bloody violence. The movie looks good, and the 3D effects are largely amusing since they mostly consist of bullets, axes, and blood spatter being shoved toward the viewer.

Fans of the games might appreciate the use of various familiar monsters—more so than the earlier films, including critters from *Resident Evil 4* and *5*. The effects are cheesy, for the most part, but they get the job done, even though it's clearly obvious when the movie is plastering a CG tentacle on human zombies.

Series fans might appreciate the inclusion of several making-of shorts and director and star commentary, but *Retribution* is by no means a good movie. It's shiny and good looking, yet essentially an attractive shell for dumb violence and a nonsensical plot. It is an evolutionary improvement for the series, but that's not saying much at all.

PlayStation The Official Magazine
5

JASON D'APRILE



Batman
The Dark Knight Returns – Part One

The best Batman this side of Nolan

WB Animation has been doing a spectacular job of recreating beloved DC superhero tales, but *The Dark Knight Returns* is easily its best yet. Taking the greatest thing Frank Miller ever wrote and adapting it to a feature-length animated movie might have been an arduous process, but the end result is seamless. Aside from Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy, this is the finest Batman story ever put on film.

Miller wrote and set *DKR* in the 1980s, during the era of Reaganomics and Cold War paranoia. The fact that WB kept the story in the '80s is a brilliant touch that adds an incredible air of authenticity to this dark tale of Batman's return after a decade of retirement. Gotham is in shambles, with a violent gang of freaks called the Mutants taking over. Jim Gordon is Bruce's best friend now and a week from retirement, which in any other context would be a laughable cliché.

Peter Weller (best known for *Robocop*) voices this aged Batman, lending a superb sense of menace and anger to the character. The story is as much about the torture of mental illness and adapting to the times as it is about good versus evil. Batman is a very flawed hero here, obsessed and self-absorbed, and still hounded by his inner demons.

The script stays amazingly true to Miller's source material. Taking off from the Batman of the '70s and early '80s, this is a low-tech, grungy vigilante story about a guy in a tight suit who gets by on vicious fighting skills and pure stubborn anger. The original story's somewhat creepy overtones regarding his relationship with Robin is well-played here as well—this time with a teenage girl who decides to pick up the mantle. For fans of the comics, this is a fantastic retelling of the classic tale. For everyone else, it's simply one of the best superhero movies out there. JD

PlayStation The Official Magazine 9

COMBO PACK
BATMAN
THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS

Info
Price $24.98
Creators Frank Miller, Jay Olivia, Bob Goodman
Starring Peter Weller
Rated PG-13 **Extras** Featurettes, two episodes of *Batman: the Animated Series*.

Blu-ray Roundup

Eastbound and Down Season 3

Price: $39.98 **Rated:** TV-MA

The equivalent of watching a train wreck in action, this third season of HBO's character study about an idiotically offensive, washed-up baseball player is equal parts hilarious, jaw-dropping, and uncomfortable. It's also surprisingly entertaining. 7

Safe

Price $39.99 **Rated** R

Jason Statham does what he does best in this decent action flick that suffers from uneven pacing. But with some great one-liners and brutal fight scenes, *Safe* is worth a look as a broken-down Statham doles out massive damage while trying to save a kid. 6

The Tall Man

Price $29.97 **Rated** R

This is a surprisingly political horror-thriller that features an impressive performance by Jessica Biel. It works thanks to tight direction and a series of interesting twists that keep viewers guessing. It's not perfect, but different enough to be worth watching. 7

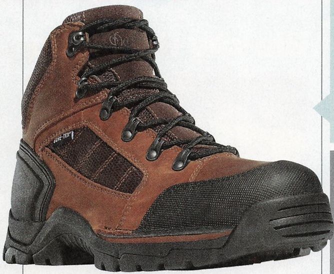
Beyond the Black Rainbow

Price $29.98 **Rated** R

A ploddingly slow and bizarre art film/psychological horror movie that takes great pains to act as if it came straight out of the '80s. It's not for everyone, but for those who like strange, off-kilter filmmaking, this crazy—if overly chatty—film is just the thing. 6

Want that

Lust-have stuff for PlayStation people

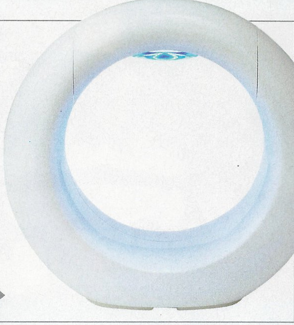


Danner Rampant TFX Plain Toe 4.5-inch Work Boots

Before we get our Nathan Drake on, we combat the elements with a slip-proof outsole and shock-absorbing midsole.

$170

danner.com

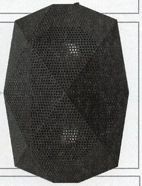


Cielux Lune

Been looking for a way to sci-fi-ify your dwelling? Boasting seven primary colors, adjustable light intensity, and two automatic color-fading modes, the Lune can instantly turn a game cave into colorful variations on Neo Tokyo.

$160

cielux.com



Outdoor Tech Turtle Shell

This wireless boombox mounts to most anything and features Bluetooth streaming capability, a built-in speakerphone, a rechargeable battery, and volume and track control. Bike riding will never be lonely again.

$150

outdoortechnology.com

Diamond GC1000 HD Game Capture

Capture games in their full HD glory: Each video/audio stream can pass through the box to a matching port on the opposite side, so games can be played on a TV and recorded to a PC.

$160

diamondmm.com

Tritton 720+ 7.1 Surround Headset

Featuring directional Dolby 7.1 Surround Sound, these lightweight headphones offer immersive audio. Selectable Voice Monitoring lets us hear our own voice through the headset.

$150

trittonaudio.com

Vitamix 7500

Time to up our snack game considerably. The 7500's dummy-proof controls and high-performance motor lets us pulverize dense ingredients in moments, turning most anything into smoothies, milkshakes, or even hearty chili.

$530

vitamix.com

This is **Richard**. He knows it's his job to teach his son **Scotty** what this whole gaming thing is about. The age rating helps him **pick the right games**, but being a good dad means he always wants to know more.

That's exactly what the **ESRB's rating summaries** are for.

Search for a game's rating summary at **ESRB.org**.

Rich H.

Lafayette, IN

ESRB ENTERTAINMENT SOFTWARE RATING BOARD

EARLY CHILDHOOD eC CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

EVERYONE 10+ E 10+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

ADULTS ONLY 18+ AO CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

mail@ptom

PS3 PSP PSVITA

Pl Station®

Th al Magazine

WORLD EXCLUSIVE REVIEW

RESIDENT EVIL 6

The survival horror epic returns and we play it first!

WIN RE6! See page 25

REVIEWED
Borderlands 2
Tekken Tag Tournament 2
Transformers: Fall of Cybertron
Sound Shapes

ALIEN CONSPIRACY

Why XCOM: Enemy Unknown is the best new game not on your radar

ACIII: LIBERATION GRID 2 KILLZONE PS ALL-STARS

We know we're not the only ones who see the sexual tension on this cover. Look harder. It's there.

This month we show Naughty Dog tons of love, think about Tomb Raider's history, and spoil our reviews

Email us at PTOM_letters@futureus.com or write to PTOM, c/o Future US, 4000 Shoreline Ct. Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

Moms for Games

I wrote in previously about being a gaming mom of two tweens (Hi, Alex and Krys). I'm addicted to *Uncharted* and will look at your advice and try *Assassin's Creed*. But I'm really interested in the game *The Last of Us*. When does it come out, and have you done a review on it? I'm now picking up my son's PTOMs as I find it interesting reading material. Thank you.

LINDA TORONTO, CANADA

Thanks, we're glad that your children managed to indoctrinate you into the world of gaming! There's no set release date for The Last of Us *right now, but it's expected to come out next year. So no review yet, but keep reading, as we'll be covering everything we can on* Last of Us *until it hits.*

Sitting in anxious anticipation of something? Yeah, we know that feeling.

Corruption in the System

Sometimes when I know I'm not going to use my PS3 for a long time after turning it off, I unplug it. I was wondering if this could corrupt data because once, after about three weeks, I plugged it back in and it said: "Data may be corrupted." (Fortunately, none was.) I might have turned off my PS3 too soon after quitting a game, but I'm not sure. Will unplugging a PS3 after turning it off damage it or my data?

HENRY LEVIN THE INTERNET

This could have to do with how you powered down your PS3. If you perform a hard shutdown (e.g. flip the switch on the back of a PS3 "fatboy" models) or if the system isn't completely done shutting down when you unplug it, it will inform you that some data may have been corrupted. You can also get this message if you turn the system off before it has finished installing new updates or overwriting a save file. If there is corrupted data, you'll have to delete it, but unplugging a PS3 should not specifically trigger data corruption.

Balancing the Field

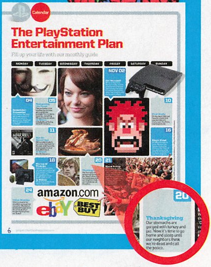
My friends and I are paramedics who enjoy a few rounds of *Modern Warfare 3* or *Battlefield 3* in between responses. Believe it or not, the question of ditching XP and unlocks is a hot topic within my circle of gaming friends. It pleases us to rank up and get better and get more powerful weapons. But at the same

Holidazed

In the newest issue of The Official U.S. PlayStation magazine on page six the calendar states Thanksgiving is on the 20th of November... WRONG!!!! Who thought that one up??

DAVID STONE THE INTERNET

We could blame this on any number of things. Maybe we had too much fun at a company party and forgot how calendars work. Maybe there was a gremlin in our computer with a proclivity for changing dates (See Hanukkah in Issue 53). The truth is, we are manly men...except maybe Anne. Checking what day a holiday falls on is like asking for directions or reading instruction manuals. We just don't. (But seriously, there was an error when laying out the page. It happens.)



Calendar

The PlayStation Entertainment Plan

Fill up your life with our monthly guide

MONDAY TUESDAY WEDNESDAY THURSDAY FRIDAY SATURDAY SUNDAY

NOV 02

04 05 10 11 16 18 20 21 24

20

Thanksgiving
Our stomachs are gorged with turkey and pie. Now it's time to go home and sleep until our neighbors think we're dead and call the police.

6

We welcome reader photos, letters, and stories ("Submissions"), however, we cannot promise to publish any Submission and none will be returned. Neither PlayStation: The Official Magazine ("PTOM") nor Future US, Inc. shall be liable for loss or damage to any Submission. By sending in your Submissions to PTOM you represent and warrant that you own or otherwise have all necessary rights to the Submissions to allow us to publish them in PTOM and as follows. You grant PTOM a worldwide, royalty-free, perpetual, irrevocable, non-exclusive right and fully sub-licensable license to use, copy, distribute, publish, modify, adapt, translate, and store, your Submissions, in any form, format, or medium, of any kind now known or later developed and to use your name, likeness, and any other information in connection with the use of the Submission you provide.

time, few things are as frustrating as getting wasted every time we take two steps out the door. If only game developers could find a way to match up players more equally in the MP maps when it comes to, not only rank and equipment, but actual performance and skill. Perhaps a match-up of similar kill/death ratios within equal XP ranks? It gets boring pwning noobs who I know have absolutely no chance against me left and right. And if it isn't boring to you, then you're not competing, you're just being a bully.

DEADMAN (OR DANIEL BERGMAN)
THE INTERNET

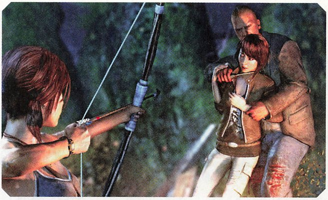
That's almost exactly the point Roger was trying to make. There should either be a better way to balance matches so players are matched up with those of a similar skill level or all players should be created equal. That's what our forefathers wanted for us when they wrote the Constitution. On that note, Anne is absolutely a bully who enjoys hearing the death howls of her enemies over actual competition. For shame!

Classical Beauty

All of my fav HD collections have been coming out, but the games that got me into gaming—the classic *Tomb Raider* games—haven't even been talked about for a HD collection. I'm pretty sure Eidos sold the rights to Crystal Dynamics (their collection is garbage and a disgrace to fans of *TR*). Shouldn't Eidos still have the rights to use these classics, and will there ever be a collection coming out for any PSone classic games like *TR*?

TYREL GRAHAM THE INTERNET

Eidos (well, technically Square Enix) actually owns Crystal Dynamics, which is just the development studio in charge of the series. Acquiring the rights to the classic games really shouldn't be an issue. Still, there's no indication that a classic HD collection is in the works. Maybe if Crystal Dynamics' new Tomb Raider *reboot is a hit when it arrives next year, it'll spur interest in the original games and give Square Enix an incentive to release a proper HD collection.*



Uncharted 4: Drake Goes to Summer Camp

I love the *Uncharted* series, and I've been playing *U3* since I could get my grubby little hands on it. *The Last of Us* looks fine, great actually, but I'll always stay true to Nathan Drake. My point is, WHERE IS *U4*?! I have heard the whole "Naughty Dog split into two groups to make *U4* and *Last of Us*" rumor, but I want confirmation! And I was hoping since you are the publisher, maybe you might have some info on this (I hope). Also, do you know if this will be a PS4 launch title?

MASON THE INTERNET

Naughty Dog actually split into two teams after Uncharted 2. *Half the team worked on* Uncharted 3 *and half started work on* The Last of Us. *We don't know if the team will remain separate after the release of* The Last of Us, *but Naughty Dog has said there is a future for Nathan Drake.*

If we ever do see Uncharted 4, *it will most likely be in the next console generation. As a side note, we're a magazine, so we don't publish the games. We just write about them.*

Trust us, guys, if we actually published the *Uncharted* series, we'd be sure to keep those bad boys coming.

Ask Mikel

Q I have a lot to say about your handling of *Resident Evil 6*. It's hard to get a huge spoiler-filled article in issue 063. After reading it, I still had hope that you guys left things out like Jill or Claire showing up. But boom, without even a spoiler warning, you dropped that bomb on me in the issue 064 review. Please be more mysterious with your handling of these blockbusters.

JON HARPER
THE INTERNET

A To be fair, the spoilers in our October issue only covered the first two of each character's five chapters, and I took pains to leave out a few big reveals. And as you probably know by now, I barely scratched the story's surface. Also, is it really a spoiler to say something *isn't* in a game? I'd rather know up-front if Jill and Claire are no-shows than wait and be disappointed, but maybe that's just me.

Et Cetera

All the other stuff that distracts PTOM

Gangnam Style

"Yes, I know you're all probably sick of the song by now, but I've gotta give props to Psy for taking K-Pop worldwide. I admit it, I love 'Gangnam Style' and spend way too much time watching the endless parade of parody videos as well." **ROGER BURCHILL**

Gunshow

"K.C. Green is, hands down, one of the best people ever to draw comics and put them online. If you've ever wanted to see what life would be like if comic strips were actually funny, point your Internets to gunshowcomic.com and see what happens." **MIKEL REPARAZ**

Ovens

"Borrowing heavily from the Weezer school of fuzzy, solo-riddled rock 'n' roll, Ovens' 44 track self-titled collection packs short songs, downer lyrics, and weird classical riffs into a package that's remarkably cohesive for something so long." **SCOTT BUTTERWORTH**

Chocolate

"*Chocolate* is one of my favorite martial arts films. JeeJa Yanin plays an autistic girl with almost supernatural levels of perception and incredible fighting skills. This badass chick did all her own stunts, seriously injuring herself multiple times." **ANNE LEWIS**

PS3 Essential collection

Build the ultimate PS3 library with our no-filler guide to the best next-gen games

1

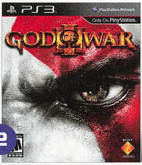
Cliffhanger

Uncharted 3

Drake's Deception

A PS3 essentials collection without *Uncharted* is like a life without air. This love child of Lara Croft and Indiana Jones is a deft blend of storytelling, memorable characters, and action gameplay.

10
Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Naughty Dog**



2

Acts of Vengeance

God of War III

Huge, beautiful battlegrounds and brutally gory fights with magnificent climaxes—we expected the world from the finale of Kratos' trilogy, and we got it. A must-have for anyone with even the slightest amount of bloodlust.

10
Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Santa Monica Studio**

NEW

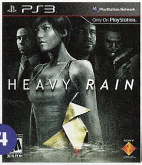
3

Shooter Looter

Borderlands 2

The first *Borderlands* mixed shooter action with deep RPG elements but fell short on presentation and structure. This sequel addresses all the previous misses and delivers 60-plus hours of topnotch gaming. And guns...lots of guns.

10
Pub **2K Games**
Dev **Gearbox Software**



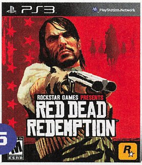
4

Cinematic Adventure

Heavy Rain

Innovative, intriguing, and immersive, *Heavy Rain* is one of the most original titles in years. The mystery of the Origami Killer will keep you guessing until it's solved... or until the heroes die in the process.

10
Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Quantic Dream**



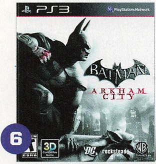
5

Western Wonder

Red Dead Redemption

Continuing its track record of amazing titles, Rockstar's latest open-world game combines a drop-dead gorgeous Old West with a mesmerizing story and memorable characters.

10
Pub **Rockstar Games**
Dev **Rockstar SD/North**



6

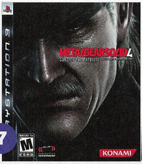
Knight Makes Right

Batman

Arkham City

PTOM's 2011 PS3 Game of the Year, *Arkham City* presents us with a deliciously realized open world—even more reason to fall in love with Gotham's dark underbelly and its determined protector.

10
Pub **Warner Bros. Int.**
Dev **Rocksteady**



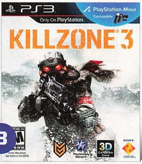
7

Wealth of Stealth

Metal Gear Solid 4

Hideo Kojima's masterpiece might be criticized for its lengthy cutscenes and convoluted storyline, but that shouldn't stop anyone from experiencing one of the most important games on any platform today.

10
Pub **Konami**
Dev **Kojima Productions**



8

War of the Worlds

Killzone 3

War isn't pretty...unless you're playing *Killzone 3*. The latest clash between the ISA and Helghast offers more than just great graphics, though, with improvements to combat, story, and multiplayer that propel it to the FPS genre's top ranks.

10
Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Guerrilla Games**

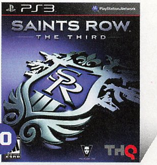
9

Beat Street

Super Street Fighter IV

An update to the best fighting game from the most well-respected series in gaming history makes for a can't-miss title. Kicking heads and nostalgia combine to form one perfect package.

10
Pub **Capcom**
Dev **Capcom**



10

Devilishly Entertaining

Saints Row

The Third

For those who want more cat-men and exploding octopi in their open world games, *Saints Row* comes loaded with wacky side quests and a storyline full of good ol' dirty, outrageous fun.

10
Pub **THQ**
Dev **Volition**

Team Choice

Sleeping Dogs

"I'm a sucker for open-world games, so I was excited when this game was originally announced as *True Crime: Hong Kong* and then...canceled. Amazingly, it came back from the dead as *Sleeping Dogs*, and even more amazingly, it's awesome Hong Kong crime drama fun."

Roger Burchill
Editor in Chief

Power
Custom silicon harnesses crisp HD, ear-splitting audio, multi-processor might, and Blu-ray to deliver pure gaming perfection.

Online
Surf the net, message friends, and download movies, music and expansion packs, plus demos and games from the PlayStation Store.

Connectivity
USB slots to plug in DualShock pads and many other devices.

PS3
INCLUDES 6+ HOURS OF BONUS MISSIONS
MASS EFFECT 2

11

Sci-Finest RPG

Mass Effect 2

Mass Effect 2 has a spectacular story wrought with intense action and game-changing decisions. We loved *Mass Effect 3* as well, but the ending didn't quite live up to *ME2's* masterful build-up. Maybe you could just play both?

10 Pub **Electronic Arts**
Dev **BioWare**

PS3
PlayStation Move
Only On PlayStation
LittleBigPlanet 2

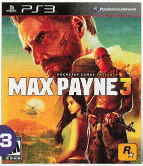
12

Great to Create

LittleBigPlanet 2

Oh Sackboy, how we love thee. The biggest little platformer on PS3 is rocking our world with its sequel. The standard in-game fare is excellent, but it's the ingenious community-crafted levels that truly amaze and delight.

10 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Media Molecule**



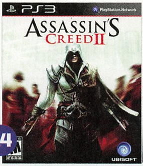
13

Maximum Carnage

Max Payne 3

Our favorite world-weary antihero returns, this time blasting his bullet-time way through Brazil as he deals with gunfire and depression. Rockstar nails its signature mix of shooter action and gritty story once again.

10 Pub **Rockstar Games**
Dev **Rockstar Studios**



14

Chock Full of Stalk

Assassin's Creed II

While the first *Assassin's Creed* may not have lived up to its full potential, Ubisoft built off what they learned to create the most epic parkour-infused adventure of all time. Even now, Ezio's introduction is still the best of the series.

10 Pub **Ubisoft**
Dev **Ubisoft Montreal**

PS3
PORTAL 2
VALVE

15

Involving Puzzle Solving

Portal 2

Valve's insidiously creative puzzle adventure twists our perception of reality with its one of a kind portal gun. If your brain starts hurting, invite a friend—co-op adds a "hole" other dimension to the gameplay.

9 Pub **Valve / EA**
Dev **Valve**

PS3
NEED FOR SPEED HOT PURSUIT

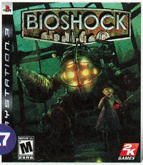
16

Ultimate Car Chases

Need for Speed Hot Pursuit

The high-speed pursuits from the good old days are back, and they look better than ever. Race the cops or join them—either way the cars are hot, so don't let that sway which side of the law you select.

10 Pub **Electronic Arts**
Dev **Criterion Games**



17

Rapturous Shooter

BioShock

One of the most beautifully designed shooters of all time with an amazing story to boot. Due to the freshness and originality of the first romp through Rapture, we recommend the original over the still magnificent sequel.

10 Pub **2K Games**
Dev **Irrational Games**

NEW
PS3
NBA 2K13
JAY Z

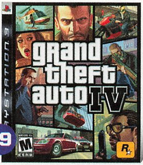
18

Dynasty Achieved

NBA 2K13

What sports franchise can lay claim to scaring its competition off the court two years running? The *NBA 2K* series. *2K12* was already brilliant, but *2K13's* Control Stick system raises the reigning champ's game even higher.

10 Pub **2K Sports**
Dev **Visual Concepts**



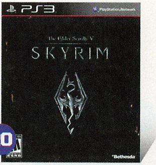
19

Criminal Mastermind

Grand Theft Auto IV

There's a reason why *GTA* sells like crazy. This open-world gangster game is one of the most incredible achievements that the videogame medium has to offer. Great story, great characters, great adventure. Just plain great.

10 Pub **Rockstar Games**
Dev **Rockstar North**



20

Legendary Roleplaying

The Elder Scrolls V Skyrim

The vast world presented in *Skyrim* offers hundreds of hours of immersive exploration and adventure. It's an intelligent RPG with gorgeous, intense action. Plus, dragons.

10 Pub **Bethesda**
Dev **Bethesda**

PSN
Best Games

It's the best of the best! Get the lowdown on this month's PSN goodies no one should live without.

BEST FULL GAMES

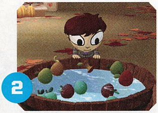
1

A Beautiful Death

Limbo

Limbo may have taken its time coming to PSN, but it was worth the wait. This platformer melds simple controls with supremely challenging gameplay and a beautiful, but chilling, aesthetic. It's the rare game where we die often, but never feel frustrated.

10
Pub **Playdead**
Dev **Playdead**



2

Tricks and Treats

Costume Quest

Sure, *Quest* is Halloween-themed, but the adventure itself is timeless. With candy and monster-smiting in equal measure, this sugary RPG is a charming homage to classics like *Final Fantasy*, enhanced by developer Tim Schafer's trademark sense of humor.

9
Pub **THQ**
Dev **Double Fine**

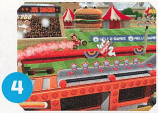
3

Frightening Lightning

inFamous
Festival of Blood

This standalone spinoff sees *inFamous* hero Cole MacGrath facing off against vampires. At stake? (groan) Cole's very own soul. It's enough to make vampires fashionably cool again—in spite of *Twilight*.

9
Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Sucker Punch**



4

Thrills and Spills

Joe Danger

An enthralling mix of *Excitebike*-style racing and insane stunt-driven platforming action, this vibrant indie gem shines brightly among the best PSN offerings available. Getting wild and dangerous on a motorbike has never been this awesome.

9
Pub **Hello Games**
Dev **Hello Games**

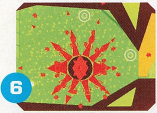
5

Zen Exploration

Flower

This gorgeous concept game turns blowing hordes of fluttering petals around a lush natural environment into an unforgettable experience that holds up against the biggest AAA offerings. Consider it a suitable substitute for a bouquet for your loved one.

9
Pub **SCEA**
Dev **thatgamecompany**



6

Platform Harmony

Sound Shapes

While we're partial to playing this melodious platformer via Vita (and its touch controls), there's no denying that this seemingly simple game charms and mesmerizes us with its blend of puzzle-ish level navigation and music creation. Creating and sharing levels just adds to the symphony.

9
Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Queasy Games**

7

Brain Strainer

Quantum Conundrum

The latest mindbender from developer Kim Swift, one of the masterminds behind the iconic *Portal* puzzle franchise, *Conundrum* has us navigate a mysterious mansion by shifting dimensions—each possessing its own unique physics-manipulating property.

9
Pub **Square Enix**
Dev **Airtight Games**

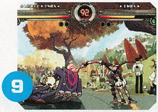
8

Has Heart, Wants Brains

The Walking Dead
Episode 1–A New Day

Licensed games are usually horrific, and not in the good way. *The Walking Dead* bucks the trend with a riveting episodic adventure marked by an engrossing narrative, life-changing decisions, and heart-pounding showdowns with zombie hordes.

9
Pub **Telltale Games**
Dev **Telltale Games**



9

Ladies' (Fight) Night

Skullgirls

With the fighting genre in the midst of a resurgence, it's nice to see a new IP join the fray. *Skullgirls* features a cast of eight hand-drawn, superpowered femme fatales in glorious 2D and offers an enticing mix of accessibility and depth. Don't overlook this one.

9
Pub **Konami / Autumn Games**
Dev **Reverge Labs**

10

We Are Not Alone

Journey

The hauntingly beautiful and atmospheric *Journey* has us wandering a desert to reach a distant mountain. Along the way, we may or may not encounter and wordlessly communicate with fellow travelers who can aid us in our quest. Is this a game or a metaphor for life?

8
Pub **SCEA**
Dev **thatgamecompany**

PSN Video Delivery Service Spotlight

What we're downloading to our PS3 this month

“Who's next, Rambo?”

Back for War.
THE EXPENDABLES 2

The Expendables 2

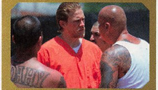
ETA **November 20** Rated **R** Genre **Action** Studio **Millenium Films**

Seemingly every action star ever has come together to make this action fan's wet dream come true. *The Expendables 2* has revenge, explosions, old guys who're just doing their best to stand up... Basically, everything it takes to make a great, cheesy movie. It's got Stallone, Statham, Norris, Van Damme, Willis, and near everyone else who's ever held a gun in a movie, making it the perfect flick for some popcorn tossing and side commentary. Those who loved the over-the-top, '80s-worshipping first film will likely enjoy this sequel even more.

Top VDS Downloads

Movies

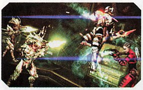
The Avengers
Snow White and the Huntsman
Battleship
The Cabin in the Woods
Safe



TV Shows

Sons of Anarchy: Season 5
Breaking Bad: Season 5
Doctor Who: Season 7
Hell on Wheels: Season 2
Spartacus: Vengeance – Season 2

BEST FREE STUFF

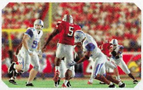


Effective Action

Mass Effect 3
Retaliation DLC

Retaliation ushers in some major multiplayer game changes, including a new battle faction, a challenge system, crazy hazards on existing maps, and a glut of new gear to get our kill on.

Pub **Electronic Arts**
Dev **BioWare**



New Jerseys

NCAA Football 13
Uniform Pack 1

Hit the field in style with these slick uniform updates for a dozen different teams, including Texas A&M, Missouri, Rutgers, FIU, Arizona, and more. Grab the pigskin and let's get mauling.

Pub **Electronic Arts**
Dev **EA Tiburon**

Furry Flurry

Tokyo Jungle
Plush Characters

Taking the peculiar post-apocalyptic fight for furry animal survival to even stranger heights, this trio of costume downloads let us play as the too-cute Toro, Kuro, and Kulche characters.

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Crispy's!**

Get Wasted

Starhawk
Echo Scrapyard

This free multiplayer homeworld offers junk heaps galore to blast in and around. Don't forget to hit the canyon for some jetbike action, and check out Huxley Ardin's mechanics shop, too.

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Lightbox Interactive**

War-drobe

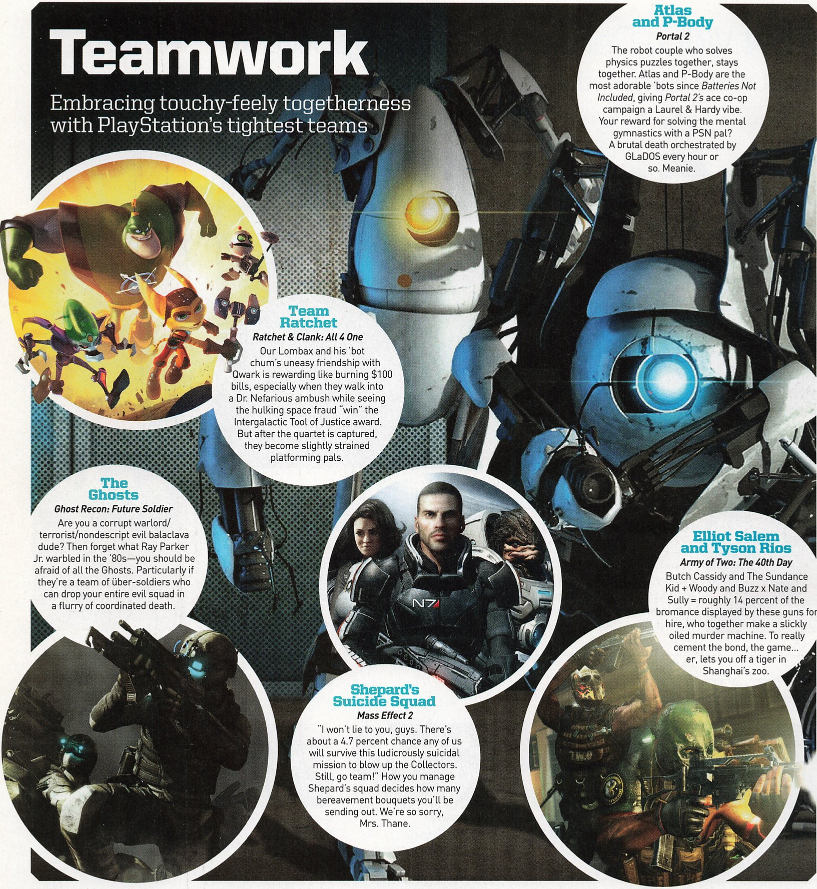
Dead or Alive 5
Costume Pack 1

Who doesn't like some new threads from time to time to snazzify things? Deck out 11 of *DOA5's* crazy combatants with these free costumes to add some fashion flair to the butt-kicking.

Pub **Tecmo Koei**
Dev **Team Ninja**

Teamwork

Embracing touchy-feely togetherness with PlayStation's tightest teams



Atlas and P-Body

Portal 2

The robot couple who solves physics puzzles together, stays together. Atlas and P-Body are the most adorable 'bots since *Batteries Not Included*, giving *Portal 2's* ace co-op campaign a Laurel & Hardy vibe. Your reward for solving the mental gymnastics with a PSN pal? A brutal death orchestrated by GLaDOS every hour or so. Meanie.

Team Ratchet

Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One

Our Lombax and his 'bot chum's uneasy friendship with Qwark is rewarding like burning $100 bills, especially when they walk into a Dr. Nefarious ambush while seeing the hulking space fraud "win" the Intergalactic Tool of Justice award. But after the quartet is captured, they become slightly strained platforming pals.

The Ghosts

Ghost Recon: Future Soldier

Are you a corrupt warlord/terrorist/nondescript evil balaclava dude? Then forget what Ray Parker Jr. warbled in the '80s—you should be afraid of all the Ghosts. Particularly if they're a team of über-soldiers who can drop your entire evil squad in a flurry of coordinated death.

Elliot Salem and Tyson Rios

Army of Two: The 40th Day

Butch Cassidy and The Sundance Kid + Woody and Buzz x Nate and Sully = roughly 14 percent of the bromance displayed by these guns for hire, who together make a slickly oiled murder machine. To really cement the bond, the game... er, lets you off a tiger in Shanghai's zoo.

Shepard's Suicide Squad

Mass Effect 2

"I won't lie to you, guys. There's about a 4.7 percent chance any of us will survive this ludicrously suicidal mission to blow up the Collectors. Still, go team!" How you manage Shepard's squad decides how many bereavement bouquets you'll be sending out. We're so sorry, Mrs. Thane.

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